

The Broad River Review



The
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Review**

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THE BROAD RIVER REVIEW

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AMANDA WOOD

Eden

in the still cool
every inch of emptiness
waits for you to speak
my name

your breath
strong from hours of song –
calling out to Deepness
Deepness calling you

and me –

your breath
strong from hours of song
touches mine
as you bend
resting on your elbows
in white, dancing light

smiling

your bicep brushes
skin above my rib cage
and I cup my hand
against your side
fitting warm flesh bone pulse

birthplace of my being

ASHLEY MAYS

Hannah and Shawn

Hannah walked with an air of resignation towards the wood shed behind her grandmother's house. It was cluttered; garden tools and old rusted gasoline cans littered the ground. Hannah looked around for a few seconds until she found the object that she was looking for. She grabbed the tool and backtracked to the gravel driveway. She heard the gravel crunching beneath her feet and the cheerful birds of the springtime season. The gravel soon turned to grass, which gave way to a path through the woods, covered in decaying leaves. Hannah saw the tree in the distance and pressed on, her task foremost in her mind.

Hannah felt nothing as the tree became close enough to touch. She was incapable of feeling anything; the only thing she was aware of was the rough feel of the wooden handle of the hatchet in her hands. Sunlight filtered through the woods where she now knelt beside the tree, oblivious to the dirt sticking to her yellow dress.

"Hey, Hannah! I bet you can't climb this tree faster than I can!" Shawn's eleven year old voice called to her from over her left shoulder. She stood up quickly.

"I bet I can climb way better than you, you stupid boy!" Hannah emphasized the word, hoping to make him feel inferior. She jumped up from the ground and raced barefooted over to the tree where Shawn stood, her blond hair whipping around her face as her anger towards her childhood friend grew. Shawn stuck his tongue out at her before leaping onto the bottom branch of the medium-sized oak tree in the middle of the woods. He started to scale the tree, but Hannah, not to be outdone, grabbed the lower branches as well and began to climb, her competitive streak coming to fore. She climbed until her arms ached. She didn't care about the pain- the only thing she had wanted was to beat Shawn to the top of the tree.

"I told you I could do it, Shawn!" she yelled triumphantly from the top of the tree.

"So what? I don't care. I'll bet you can't get down now," Shawn called to her from the middle branches of the tree. Hannah looked around. She was awfully high up. The ground looked so far away, and she couldn't remember how she had gotten up. She looked

around, not willing to let Shawn see the fear that was tickling her mind.

“I can get down,” she said, her voice trembling a little bit. Shawn grinned up at her.

“No, you can’t. You’re scared. Scaredy-cat, scaredy-cat,” he taunted her making Hannah want to hit him, even though both of her hands were tightly gripping the skinny branches where she was perched precariously. Shawn made the tree shake and Hannah screamed. He laughed.

“This isn’t funny, Shawn! I don’t know how to get down!” Hannah felt tears stinging her eyes and hated herself for it. She never wanted to let Shawn see her tears. Shawn came closer, almost reaching her and saw the wetness in her eyes. In spite of his adolescent boyish attitude, Shawn smiled.

“Hey, don’t worry. I know how to get down,” he reassured her in a moment of uncharacteristic kindness. Hannah angrily swiped at a renegade tear that fell down her cheek. In the next few minutes Shawn guided Hannah back down the tree with his voice, allowing both of them a safe reentry onto the ground. As soon as her feet touched the ground, Hannah muttered a quick thanks only because it was the polite thing to do and then took off towards her grandmother’s house, her only desire to get away from the embarrassment that her tears and getting stuck in the tree had caused. She vowed never to let Shawn see her cry again.

Hannah picked up the hatchet and angrily swung into the tree that she had come to, valiantly trying to keep tears from her eyes. The hatchet stuck in the trunk of the oak tree, giving her some satisfaction in her destruction. Now wasn’t a time for tears, she determined.

“Um, Hannah?” Shawn’s voice, now sixteen years old, floated to her ears. Hannah turned around from where she was working on the flowers in her grandmother’s garden. The tulips were looking nice this spring, and she had worked hard on them throughout the year. She had traded in her tomboyish cutoffs and tee-shirts for a much more feminine wardrobe and had also long since avoided insulting Shawn with immature comments. He had done the same, and it seemed that their next-door neighbor friendship continued to grow each year. He had become her best friend, and she shared everything with him. He had taught her how to drive, had

helped her with her math homework, had mowed the lawn for her grandmother on occasion. Over the years Shawn had become a close friend and Hannah loved him as such.

"Hey, Shawn. What do you need?" she asked, immediately concerned when he didn't return her smile.

"I need to tell you something." Shawn looked away from her and became very concerned with a piece of mulch at his feet. Hannah's heart dropped to her feet. Shawn was never serious. He always had a joke, always was making her laugh. This wasn't her best friend.

"What do you need to tell me?" Hannah barely got the words out of her mouth, her voice trembling. She took off her gardening gloves and stepped closer to Shawn.

"Hannah, my family's moving." Shawn forced the sentence out quickly and Hannah almost thought that she had misunderstood him.

"Moving?" she asked and Shawn nodded, his dark brown eyes regarding her quietly.

"To where?" she choked out.

"Michigan," he whispered looking away. Hannah felt the blood drain from her face. Michigan was a long ways away. Michigan wouldn't be like the mountains of Virginia, that was for sure.

"When?" she said, stepping closer.

"Next month. After school gets out." Shawn shifted uncomfortably on his feet and put his hands in his pockets. "It's my dad's job. He's been promoted and that's where they need him." Hannah was silent. Her best friend was leaving. It wasn't fair.

"Hannah, I'll write to you. I promise, I won't forget you." Shawn looked up, his own voice catching in his throat. She nodded.

"I'll write too, Shawn. I promise." Hannah sat for an hour in the dirt after that, willing the tears to leave her eyes. She hadn't let Shawn see her cry, as she had promised herself when she was eleven years old, but now that he was gone, she couldn't stop.

Hannah took another hard swing at the tree. The hatchet stuck further in the bark and she pulled to take it back and swung again with vengeance.

"Hannah?" a familiar voice called from behind her on the campus of Virginia Tech. Hannah turned from where she was talking

with her roommate and caught a glimpse of dark, coffee colored eyes staring at her in disbelief. Her own blue eyes widened in surprise when she recognized the owner of the voice as being her childhood best friend, Shawn.

“Shawn! What are you doing here?” she practically shouted as she ran to him for a hug.

“I just transferred here this semester. I couldn’t get Virginia out of my mind, and I was tired of Michigan so I decided to come back to see how I liked it. I never dreamed that you would be here!” Shawn spoke excitedly, his voice bringing back so many memories. Hannah smiled.

“You mean, you’re going to stay here?” she asked, the thrill of the unexpected meeting running through her body. Shawn nodded.

“I’m here to stay,” he said and grinned. Hannah shook her head in near disbelief and shook her head as tears of happiness welled up in her eyes. Her best friend had come back and she had never been happier, but still she remembered the promise of ten years ago- she would not let Shawn see her cry, even if they were happy tears.

Hannah angrily swung the hatchet again and again and again at the base of the tree, only feeling a small bit satisfied when she took pieces out of the trunk. Her vision grew fuzzy as tears clouded her eyes.

“Hey, Hannah- I have a surprise for you!” Shawn’s voice smiled and Hannah grinned back in anticipation.

“Like what?” she asked, her love for her boyfriend of two years now showing in her expression.

“You’ll have to see. Come on, just get in my car,” Shawn replied and took her hand, leading her towards his vehicle. Hannah followed, trusting him completely. She started to recognize the scenery as they drove away from the university campus and closer to her grandmother’s house.

“Why are you taking me to Grandma’s house, Shawn?” she asked suspiciously. He smiled.

“I knew I should have blindfolded you.” Hannah grinned. As soon as they got to her grandmother’s house, Shawn opened the door for her and took her hand to lead her through the woods to a tree that Hannah remembered well. It was the tree that she had gotten stuck in at eleven years old. Shawn often liked to remind her of how he saved

her life at that tree, and it had become somewhat of a joke to them now. Hannah shook her head.

“Why are we here, Shawn?” she asked with a smile.

“You’ll see,” Shawn said, mischief in his voice as he took a pocket knife out of his pocket and began to carve something in the tree. Hannah sat back and waited semi-patiently to finish his secretive artwork in the tree trunk. He covered it with his hands until he was done. Finally, Shawn signaled for her to come closer. Hannah moved up and caught a glimpse of his carving which plainly said “H.N.K. & S.J.C. Forever and Always.” Hannah grinned over at him and started when she saw that he was bending on one knee. Before he could begin, Hannah’s eyes filled with tears of joy as Shawn began what he had come to say.

“Hannah, I love you.”

Hannah viciously tore at the tree, her tears now streaming down her face. Her breath came in quick gasps and she chopped with all of her might at the tree, which was beginning to tip in one direction. She was angry with herself, angry at the world, angry with everything in her life. She had let Shawn see her cry that one time when he had proposed and soon afterwards- she paused and wiped some of the tears from her cheeks. He hadn’t been worth it. Her best friend- or so she thought. Hannah swung hard with the hatchet at the tree, her eyes barely seeing the inscription that she used to love, “H.N.K. & S.J.C. Forever and Always.” She aimed at that spot on the tree and kept at it with the sharp blade of the hatchet.

“Forever? Forever, Shawn?” she shouted to no one in particular. She pushed the tree with all of her might, satisfied only a little bit when she heard a loud crack. She picked up the hatchet again and swung harder than before and only stopped when she felt sure that she would be able to push the tree over. It fell.

Hannah picked up the hatchet again and swung once more at the inscription just to make sure that it would no longer be readable, then she walked away, covered in dirt and tears to the sound of wedding bells ringing in the distance.

SUMMER HESS

Lily

Lily blooms herself,
erotic, indecisive impulse of
boldness on display.
She is a trumpet cup that swallows light.
She is a daring freckled darling that parades
as a long silky dancer.

She is unafraid.

Lily glares fierce color,
Completely, sweetly insistent—
exotic growl of the spotted tiger,
whispery, soft edges of Spanish gold,
lacy, milk marble of Easter birth.

During mid-summer's heat storm,
she dies in the humid cavern of her lover's mouth.
She dies a brief gasp of deep wonder,
for the distracted, intense awareness of first love,
which is all love.

Joy

Butterflies float on two wings,
pressing together their false eyes.
And die as they cross the road.
I remember their wholeness.
I search for others,
and my looks deceive me –
Nothing can ever be replaced.

*I close my eyes.
Drizzled patterns cross,
the pounding colors blaze and hiss
angry blotches across my back –
Shaped like two hearts
two hearts of brilliant scars that
beat so I can fly.*

Here you are,
ignoring the butterflies to symbolize their death.
In doing, you so deny their life, because they did have it,
or you could not ignore them.
You are repelled by what you do not know,
and there is so much.

*I open my eyes.
The butterfly begins to move, and I celebrate its life again.*

But there are a million ants under the spiritless flags,
triumphant in their massive discovery:
They will feast on death,
and their thousands of tiny movements make a circle in the earth.

The dusty crust of wings
litter the road like candy wrappers
blown by wind.

*There is no end.
Joy celebrates life,
and does not discriminate between forms.*

The Day After

Now the burst, enchanted,
mingles with an old smell,
a done smell.

The first flower is dead,
which means it used to be a flower.

Now it plays that dirty trick of placing its pieces,
one at a time,
into another thing.

Decomposition bears no announcement;
It is camouflage compared to the lusty herald of birth.
The slow sigh of each release is never noticed.

People celebrate the bloom, but it is only one
of a thousand symbols for the process.

Celebration
is each day
growing another layer,
a rounder curve,
softening until the weight of growth pulls it
to another place.

Time

Unseen, she wraps, unwraps in her cocoon,
contracting, breathing, turning many sides,
real as the rough and silver moon who spins
a dance to wash the ocean tides in gaze.

We try to name the shy, orgasmic stretch,
we wait and hold and sigh the lasting pause
as Time. We blame on her our death and life,
opposing forces balanced on a knife.

Without our death and life she wouldn't pass
and quickly bead the counting of our days.
We see her in the moon that hangs each night
with different silver charms to tame the sea.

Then work a graver magic in our lives—
we wear the heavy charms around our necks
that weight the shallow time to mean our change,
and change the shallow time to mean our wait.

Tomorrow

Before the vague line above the trees softens,
your edges will lose their layered tone and brown
until the stalk forgets to hold on, forgets you.
Your god recanted,
and the fall is long and firm.

Now you can no longer pray, for your have become
prayer,
absorbed into the thousands of living deaths.
Now the thousands received you, take you into their
bodies like the most basic elements—
Sun for health,
Wind for change,
Rain for tears,
Moment for eternity

JOYCE COMPTON BROWN

Breaking Through

When Chuck the Viet Nam vet was lying peacefully on his right side
on the couch on a Sunday afternoon
in his 1967 trailer down the valley from Hawksbill,
listening on his boombox to how the day destroys the night
and the night destroys the day
and remembering the island in her arms
and thinking about trout fishing tomorrow,
a mighty pine tree came crashing through the middle of the metal roof
and interrupted his vision of little brown faces and great green leaves
and ex-wives and lost sons
with the severe thud of a missile
delivered from God.
So Chuck turned over on his left side
so the rain wouldn't wet his face.

Taholah

*There would be more than ocean water broken
Before God's last Put out the light was spoken.*

— Robert Frost

On the edge of America
Crab bones float in sharp and ragged undulation
in the falling tide.
Claws fast shut, legs ripped from carcasses,
Innards picked clean, processed white liquid
splattered on the sand by hovering gulls
Eyeless shells crushed into the sand at water's edge,
Dead cover for blood-red worms.

On the edge of America
Great grey hemlocks lie
Bone-dry and saltwater smooth
in chaotic splendor.
Beneath the long bleached beams
Microbugs crawl and breed and fester
in the trapped and rotting kelp.
Above the beach massive grey stumps squat
Like splintered tombs bearing eroded epitaphs
upon the naked bluff.

On the edge of America
Metal houses bearing scarred and rusty wheels
Spill out twisted innards on hard dry dust.
Springs and mattresses and cotton stuffings
Prop against Fords and Chevrolets with gapping hoods.
Boat hulls and motor parts litter the shores.

And brown-eyed children
With skinny legs and blue-black hair
Paddle neon-glowing tricycles
Down a weed and gravel street
In little circle-footed motions
Of fury and unrealized despair.

Stumps

When I went home the umbrella trees were gone.
No limb for my swing and no branches for bluebird nests.
The beer-gutted tee-shirted greasy-bald man
had drunk out my family's good warm smell and blocked me from
the kitchen
where my mother fed fire to the wood stove and Glenn filled the
kindling box.
Nor could I touch the back porch where the dipper lay
beside the enamel bucket filled with well water.

He did not let me see my closet which held my paper dolls and
crayon boxes and stamps
or the room where she wrapped me in a quilt
and rocked me when my child bones ached
Or the room where the pine knots moved past my bed at night
or the iron beds where Loren and Glenn made fart noises with their
armpits
And made my mother giggle.

I could not reach the front room where the preacher sat stiff
on green velvet curlicues thinned by time
where the walnut tiered organ of my mother's childhood
waited for its Old English polish every Saturday
Or the room with the tall veneer wardrobe and mirrored vanity
where the Christmas oranges always stayed
cold and sweet year after year after year.

WILLIAM CORNER CLARKE

Grandfather

Outside, the idea of rain
Slowly drifts away
From the hollow left by
A previous universe
Inside the house
The echo of a loose electron
Hovers in the hallway
And a hive of chromosomes
Is buzzing quietly
In the corner of the living room

In the study
A Chinese lacquer chest
Is set against the wall
Its cedar smelling drawers
Are filled with sets
Of photographic slides
Brass drawing instruments
Boxes full of scribbled notes
And phials of different coloured
Atmospheres

In the centre of the room
On a steel and alabaster base
There rests the spirit
Of the place
A green aquarium
Filled with dreams
Like columns of suspended eels
Waving slowly to a melody
Beyond the pitch
Of human ears

Beside a casement window
Open to a summer breeze
An ancient man
With long white hair
Is busy writing at a roll top desk
And at his feet
A small child without words
Is playing on the floor
With the golden chain
Of an endless afternoon

Heat

The house has hidden itself
In the shadow of itself
 Taken cover
From the heat of the afternoon
Blinds closed, curtains drawn
 The retreat complete

On the abandoned porch
 By the front door
An insect hangs on a spider's web
 Like a crashed biplane
 It's wings entwined
With threads of gossamer

Drained by death
 The fuselage
Has become a flute
 For the dry wind
It's hollow music underscores
 The creak of the swing

Dusty catkins
 From the forest
Have gathered in the guttering
 Hanging like the dregs
 Of a dreamless sleep
Over the sagging eaves

Across the desert waste
 Of the deserted patio
 A Pharaoh's line of ants
Ferries scraps of orange peel
 Into the underworld
 Beneath the sliding doors

Beyond the mountains
Iron shells of thunderstorms
Are being forged
You can hear the boom of rivets
As they're fired
See the welding light
Against the darkening sky

LES BROWN

Iron Bridge Sunday

Mom was pulling her long dark hair back to twist into a bun. She never wore it like that except when she went to church. It was usually piled on top of her head and fastened into place with about fifty bobby pins. But tonight the bun would be round and tightly fixed into place with bone combs skewered through it to hold it firm. Dad was busy worrying with his one tie that he wore with his one white shirt and one suit, one size too small. Our polished Sunday shoes were lined up in marching order.

"It's just once a year. It won't hurt you to go," Mom said.

"We go to church ever Sunday, and preacher Lane always has altar call. So why do we have to go to a whole week of it?" I said.

"We go to church. When they have church, we go to church, and that's just the way it is," Dad said. "We're supposed to." He fished around in his dresser drawer, messing up the order Mom had carefully created, and pulled out a pair of Cloroxed and sun-whitened socks.

Mom had already put on her gardenia dress and was ready to go as Dad finished off with his brown wingtips. We trooped to the washed and waxed '51 Chevy coupe for the one-mile trip to Concord Methodist Church. We were proud of our church, built in the twenties by the Methodist farmers of the Blue Ridge valley. It replaced the little plank church down by the school where some circuit rider had snatched up my adventurous ancestors, adding guilt to their noble whiskey making heritage, but not stopping it. Most of the early Methodists settlers were buried in the old churchyard cemetery.

My grandad and the other valley farmers had built the new church out of rounded rocks from the North Fork River that cuts through the valley. Two years ago, Dad had gone to the Clinchfield Railroad Office in Spruce Pine and persuaded the section manager to donate a bell from one of the old steam engines for the church steeple.

We were proud that we didn't whoop and holler during our service. Seldom did anyone even say amen. Our services were not like Grace Free Will Baptist Church, about half way between Concord Methodist and our house. I had heard the Groce congregation one

night when I was visiting my cousin Danny, who lived just across the field. People said they would get up on the pews and run, and they would pass out on the floor, cold as a kraut rock. Free Will, Hard Shell, Primitive, First, Second, the Baptists were strange to us. My grandmother went to just plain Greenlee Baptist. She was a quiet, pious woman who would never be caught dead running across the pews, but the men of Greenlee did say "Amen" to almost everything the preacher said.

We climbed the wide concrete steps leading to the little square entrance hall of the church under the steeple. The big bell rope was tied to one side. Preacher Lane let the young boys take turns ringing it for the eleven o'clock service. By the time we arrived Stan Holtzclaw had already rung it. No greeters or ushers met us. No one gave us bulletins; we didn't need them. Everyone knew all of the songs and the disorder of the service. We always did the same thing every Sunday except for special days like Easter and Christmas. The congregation never read anything except the responsive reading of Psalms from the Methodist Hymnal. We always sang the Doxology after the offering. And tonight, as would happen through the whole week of revival, Preacher Lane would just have his long opening prayer, which we would finish with the Lord's Prayer. We would sing one hymn, never more than three stanzas, except for "Amazing Grace," and he would then go straight into his sermon. It always started slow with a good and merciful God, then slowly revved up to an angry God who would burn us in Hell if we did not repent and be saved. It would rise and fall in pitch with a quiet God's love, grace and forgiveness, giving way to stern, loud accusations that we were responsible for being born sinful. We must bow down before the altar and cry out for God's mercy, or our souls would be lost to eternal damnation in fire and brimstone, whatever that is. We must be borned again, but we must do it quietly and not whoop and holler like the Groce Baptists or Holy Rollers.

I sat with Mom and Dad in our usual place, right side, fourth row from the back. Roy Holyfield, one of my classmates at North Cove School, scooted beside me from his seat beside his big sister. His family sat at the other end of the old pew, worn slick by the butts of decades of entrenched Concord Methodists, mostly kin to each other. We whispered quietly during the service and wiled away the time playing "between the sheets" with the song titles in the hymnal. Dad sat down the row from us, cleaning under his fingernails with his Barlow knife. Mom, who stayed in her own little world of duties to

be done, sat quietly beside him, listening carefully but not hearing a word the preacher said. She gave us a stern look when Roy whispered, "Open Now Thy Gates of Beauty between the sheets," and I elbowed him in the side. We stopped talking but continued turning pages, pointing at titles and choking back smiles until we were bored enough to pay a little more attention to the preacher.

The sermon had droned on and on for over an hour, and then silence; Preacher Lane's tone fell as he said, "And now as we sing together 'Just as I Am,' Lord, just as I am, won't you come? Won't you give your life to Jesus? Won't you save your soul from torment? Listen for that still quiet voice telling you to come just as you are. He'll accept you just as you are, without condition, and your life will be changed forever as you are born again in the Spirit. Listen to the words of this beautiful old hymn and let Jesus flow into your heart. Let's sing together now. Miss Hettie, will you play softly as we wait for the Spirit to lift us from our seats to come, to come to the altar and accept Christ?"

The silence was broken by the soft-peddle notes of the upright piano as Aunt Hettie Hensley played, played sweetly.

"Just as I am without one plea, for that thy blood was shed for me" sang the people, broken and quiet at first, but swelling as the preacher's words sank into their souls. Gilbert Johnson, an elderly farmer, had, as usual, already gone straight to the altar. Reba Waycaster, a tired looking young woman with long stringy hair, also went up, leaving her fat little boy on the back pew with her husband, Jake. He looked angry through his boney sockets. The pair had dropped out of school about two years ago for some reason.

"You want to go up?" Roy asked.

"Why?"

"Other people are going up."

"You want to go up with Reba Waycaster?" I asked.

Aunt Lonie Swofford pulled herself up from her seat near the front and limped to the altar on her cane as Aunt Hettie played for the last stanza. Ralph, her son, went with her, supporting her by her arm. They were church regulars who always sat quietly in the same place. Preacher Lane held his hand up and signaled Aunt Hettie to stop playing.

"The Lord is working in this congregation tonight. He's reaching out to you. Come now as we sing the first stanza once again. Listen to the words and let them move you."

"Aw look, others are goin', Reba don't matter." Roy said.

"I'll go up if you will," I said.

"Okay," he whispered back, "But you gotta go first."

I sat there through the second re-run stanza and then said, "Let's do it." I stood up and pulled on Roy's plaid sleeve. He followed me into the aisle, and side by side, we walked slowly to the front. Preacher Lane had already laid his hand on Gilbert's and Reba's heads and was whispering to them as they kneeled on the steps of the altar. Reba was sobbing quietly.

Preacher Lane moved out to meet us, put an arm around each of us, and urged us to the velvet covered steps. We kneeled side by side, cutting our eyes at each other. Whispering to us, "Praise Jesus," the preacher placed his heavy hand firmly on our heads, lifted his other hand high as he said to the congregation, "See what the Lord has done. He has brought these lambs into the fold." Aunt Hettie was now playing "Amazing Grace." I couldn't figure it all out.

After about ten more minutes of kneeling on the velvet steps and listening to Preacher Lane coax others without success, and while Aunt Hettie played "Softly and Tenderly" twice, he gave the benediction: "And now may the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ be with you all-- until tomorrow night."

He had all of us who had been saved to go down the aisle with him so that the congregation could speak to us and shake hands as they left. Everyone in the church, especially the older women, hugged us and told us that they were proud of us.

Preacher Lane took Roy by the arm, leaned into the rest of us and said, "You new converts stay here till everybody's gone. I need to talk to you and ask you something." Roy, Reba and I stayed. Jake, Reba's husband, tapped out a Camel and lit it on his way out of the church where he propped himself on one of the rock columns at the bottom of the steps. Mom and Dad huddled in the aisle with Roy's parents. His mother was dabbing her eyes with a handkerchief.

"Now that you three have been saved, you should be baptized, if you've not already been sprinkled when you were babies. Were you?" None of us were.

We knew about baptizing because we had seen others do it in the church. The preacher just said some words different from the usual ones in the Methodist Hymnal, stuck his hand in some water, laid it on the person's head, said some stuff then prayed, and that was it. But he said to us, "You can be sprinkled in the church, or, since it's

summer, I'll baptize you in the river if you want me to."

My mom didn't believe in sprinkling or infant baptism since she grew up a Baptist and her mother wouldn't ever approve of her sprinkling her babies. Mom was afraid of her mother, whose church bun was tighter than she could ever get hers.

I had heard mom talk about people being baptized in the river, and our Sunday school teacher, Garvel Thompson, had said that was the way Jesus was baptized. I never could figure out why Jesus, who was perfect, had to be baptized. Wasn't it supposed to be, in a way, like the water was washing away your sins? What was Jesus washing away? Maybe dirt. But if it was good enough for him, it was good enough for me.

"I'd like to be baptized in the river," I said.

"Me too," said Roy. Besides, that sounded like more fun than sprinkling and having a bunch of old women hugging us in church.

Reba, never looking up from the floor and still sobbing, just said, "Okay."

"That's good, we'll do it in the swimming hole down at the Iron Bridge next Sunday after the regular service, depending on the weather."

The Iron Bridge was on Pitt's Station Road that cut off of Highway 221. The North Fork River widened and deepened under the bridge and was a favorite swimming hole where we cooled off in the hot summers of the valley floor. Some of the bolder high school boys would dive from the bridge into the eight-foot deep pool just under the bridge. Others would even jump from the top support beams that arched over the bridge.

After delivering a chiding sermon the following Sunday, Preacher Lane, disappointed by his mediocre success at the week of revival, without enthusiasm reminded the congregation about the baptism after the service. As the congregation left to their usual Sunday chicken dinners, a hand full of the stalwart church members formed a little, funeral-like procession of cars to drive the three miles to the bridge. The preacher led in his '54 wood-paneled Ford station wagon. Roy and I agreed to wear old tennis shoes and some blue jeans over our swimming trunks. The procession turned left off Highway 221, crossed the bridge and pulled to the shoulder of Pitt's Station Road across the bridge. Several youngsters who never went to church were already in the swimming hole. Preacher Lane got out of his car, walked out onto the bridge carrying his frayed Bible in hand, surveyed

the site, waved the Bible, and asked the people in the water to get out so we could have the baptizing. They all obediently did as he asked. His silver hair and confident voice went unchallenged. He put his Bible back in the station wagon, took off his tie.

We clambered down the bank to the water's edge, preacher Lane giving Reba a steady hand. He was dressed in old brown polyester suit pants and a white, shirt. He waded into the shallow edge of the water, stirring up the mud where the little kids played. The water was already warm from the hot July dog-days sun. The half naked swimmers, our Sunday dressed parents, and the congregation members formed an odd silhouette on the bridge against the bright sunlight sky. The church members were singing "Shall We Gather at the River."

Reba was first. The preacher nodded to her to come into the water. She wore a white dress with lace and a big red flower hanging below her high-buttoned collar. The gathered skirt of her dress fanned and sank, fading into the brown water around her. Her jaw was set and her eyes were hardened, unlike I had ever seen her before. Jake, now with one black eye, stood near the end of the bridge away from the others.

The preacher placed his hand gently on her back, protected her face, and lowered her carefully under the water. She arose from the water as though the preacher were not touching her. Her long brown hair draped down her back like the shawl of Mary. She now looked serene and at peace. The people on the bridge looked around as if to avoid staring at her perfectly contoured white body, now revealed like a holy ghost, in her clinging white dress. She seemed not to notice as she stared straight at Jake. Lena Hensley picked up a towel hanging across the bridge rail and tossed it down to the preacher, who draped it around Reba and helped her to the bank. I watched her red flower float away and disappear down the river.

Preacher Lane then motioned for Roy to come to him. Roy moved into the water and stood by his side. As the preacher quoted a passage about Jesus being baptized by John the Baptist, I puzzled at all of this stuff about Jesus being a Baptist. Were we just doing something that Baptists did by getting baptized? Did we sprinkle people in church just to tone down the connection with the Baptists and get it done anyway? It was all too strange, but I just went along with the flow.

Then Preacher Lane grabbed Roy's nose and held his hand

over his face. "I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost," he said. He braced under Roy's back with his other hand and quickly dunked him backwards all the way under the water. He lifted Roy out of the water, let him drain a little, and said, "Go now and serve the Lord." Roy trudged from the water, back onto solid ground.

It was my turn. Preacher Lane motioned to me. I obediently sloshed forward and stood by his side. He repeated the nose-hold and back brace, then said, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost." As he quickly lowered me backward, my feet slipped in the mud, and I did a complete back-flip over his arm. My nose came free from his hold, my feet thrashed out of the water, and I came up, head first in front of the arm that held me, coughing, sputtering the river from my nose.

Preacher Lane grabbed my collar and lifted me up like Charlie McCarthy. He held me there while the snot and muddy water cleared my disoriented head. "You okay boy?" he said. Without waiting for an answer, and undisturbed, he took my arm and wobbled me to the bank. He placed his hand on my back, pushed me up the muddy slope and said, "Go in peace, serve the Lord."

Once we were all on solid ground, he hugged Reba close, shook hands with Roy and me, and said he was proud of us. "Someday you will understand this more than you do now," he said. I hoped so.

About that time some fat guy cannon-balled from the top girder of the bridge, splashed water over us and washed the mud from my feet.

Bare Branches

Only yesterday
the tree was in full bloom
white flowers full and pure.
Only yesterday
it was full of life,
hope, beauty.
Today the wind blows
showers of petals—
like a snowstorm they
blanket the ground.
How quickly they withered.
Lost hope
Lost beauty
Lost life
Left only
Bare Branches.

ABBIE CRAGO

The Sound of Water Breaking

He tells me to wait, and listen for the sound of water breaking,
so I sit with my pen in hand on the bank of a nameless river.
His hands smell of fish and water, but that doesn't matter to me,
because I know about the rapture he feels only when he's
wading the river, waist-high in icy spring water that nips his elbows.

He casts his line, growing like a finger and drawing lines
along the cornflower sky until the water breaks in front of him.
Like a child, his eyes glint with eagerness, the tiny fly skims
circles on the water, but then the wagging shadow swallows the lure.

He pulls on the line, calling back his favorite caddis fly,
his stroke is pure and understanding of his craft,
but this catch resists his unnatural tows.
It drags the line away again, the reel a whining whir as he lets go.

I see the intent look on their faces, each wanting something different,
but each the same thing still.
As he works again to bring in his slippery prize
water splashes in perfect circles, while trees watch from overhead
with green leaves of shade to see if man with line and reel
will beat the speckled trout.
All of this I feel as the wind gathers around my bare shoulders.

Then, in silence, the taut line snaps, and the water swims away.
All of us sigh in satisfaction, the trees, the wind, the trout, and me.
But wading in the water not two feet, disappointment stands,
ready to cast again, because his only thought is the sun might expire
before he can touch the wetness with his dry hands,
hands that somehow always smell of fish and water.
But I don't mind.
Because what we do with ink or lure is all the same,
so I sit back and listen for the sound of water breaking.

Suburban Bohemian

Yeah, I'm a Bohemian.
A Suburban Bohemian
Living at ends meet,
Met by mom and dad.

I'm of an elite group:
The iconoclast
 Sleeping in pews each Sunday
The avant-garde
 Who have never created anything truly original
The dreamers
 Who can't seem to wake up their souls.

Meeting in the coffee shop
To discuss the deep flowing passions
Of love and lust,
At least what we've seen in movies.

We'll hit the road as inquisitive vagabonds
Finally letting go of all responsibility
To experience life.
At least when I finish college
 And find a career
 And get married
 And raise children
 And die.

Yeah, I guess I'm a Bohemian.
A Suburban Bohemian
Living day to day on the mean streets
 Of middle-class neighborhood
A life on the edge
 Of a cul-de-sac.

Socks in the Moonlight

Soft socks in the silver moonlight,
Worn upon her feet, dancing in the air.
The smooth cushions of the seat next to mine,
Like regal throne, for her so fair.

I gaze across to meet light blue,
Falling into her abyss of secrets.
A sovereign shiver leaves breaths heavy,
As her hand relieves me of my regrets.

Still the silence stands tall and eerie.
It remains unbroken, this familiar bliss.
But I desire more than ever just to touch;
To massage muted lips with a fluid kiss.

With that my yearning hands could flow
To slowly discover each God-designed part,
And draw in the object of such desire
As though she were the last flame in a darkened heart.

We sit quietly, watching the moon waltz with the stars
As though it knows not its own generosity.
But neither moon nor sun can cast such luster as she,
To lure me in provoked curiosity.

The longer I bask, the more diminished my doubt becomes.
She warms my soul as it serenades and succumbs
To the natural neon of her skin in the moonlight,
As the socks dance freely through the night.

And though I fear it ends at dawn,
I will see another dusk, another dance, before long...

DAVID WAYNE HAMPTON

After the Ice Storm

The still trees
dippe din crystal
wear halos over
their higher branches.

As the morning sun
spreads its brightness,
tongues of white fire
slice wide paths over
the wooded hillsides.

A sharp breeze brushes
through the iced canopy.
The cellophane air pops
with a tinkling of chimes,
the high strings of a harp
plucked by divine hand.

KIRSTEN HEMMY

Fragmentation

I befriend a boy in Senegal who can
recite the Qu'ran three times—all

the way through—by the time he is
eight. He is a gift to the world, truly,

goes to private school even though
his parents can't pay the fees. I meet

his teachers, see their eyes, lonely &
proud. For all children in training,

the first lessons are prayers. These
are the foundation & have to be

perfectly memorized if there is
any hope at all. It is through prayer

that the Imam, leader which this
boy will someday be, sends strength

& power to the masses. The words
have been written down over & over

again: the boy takes me to the library
of a prophet who spent his life

transcribing the Qu'ran. There
is nothing in the library but a thousand

books in his handwriting & the words
of the sacred. There must be a hunger

in such rhythms for them to have
survived it all: holy wars, famine,

disbelievers. I try to speak to the boy
in Arabic, which he doesn't understand.

I recite the only poems I know in French,
some Rimbaud, Baudelaire, & Mallarme.

These men are landmarks of failure,
of modernity: one's livelihood

ends in aphasia, the others abandon
their work, overcome by the notion

of the world's fragmentation. This is
something I'm not sure I can translate,

not sure this boy would understand. We
stand in silence, feeling the graves of those

around us, all the nameless lives less
somehow than ours. I wonder what will

become of this boy, all the places he
will travel in dream & through prayer.

He smiles, touches his hand to mine.
I can only speak to you in broken

things, I say, but don't tell him how
something of me longs to be shut.

The world is a beautiful place, he
says, almost a Paradise. The Qu'ran

says the world suffers, whispers
the boy, but I'll never know how.

Kilauea Iki: Devastation Trail

On cloudy nights after surf-drenched days
the soft scorch of *pahoehoe*,
lava drifting, on fire, to the sea—
slow black moans of resignation
as Yamaguchi's Kalapana Store, schools &
homes give way to the supple blanket.
So much will endure:
the store's decrepit neon sign, a stillness,
the heaviness of someone's memories.

Years later, nothing will bay at the moon
from this earth except the darkness.
A woman will hear emptiness like whispers
as she wanders the hardened mountainside,
considering the barren luridness,
the lies of fire, smoldering.

The Atrocity of Water

Water has a beautiful smell in certain places. Or it is the full, wet air, which smells of water. As I write this we are traveling by cab to my cousins' house in Pearl City on the island

of O'ahu. We drive over a bridge that was bombed. We drive past the military base where the water is so clear—a violent violet that exposes the dialectics of war. (The sunken

USS Arizona, today a tourist site which people line up for hours to see.) The bridge we travel spans a great historical distance: today, the hellish orange halos of fire

are swallowed by water; they've even stopped bombing practice off the island of Kaho'olawe. The lesson is that you can own everything. The lesson is

that we can stand for anything, even water.

Our cab driver is impressed that my cousin teaches at Keio University ("it is the Harvard of Japan"), and, using his broken

pidgin tries to engage us in a conversation about Heidegger's "Question Concerning Technology." But I am thinking about water—all the oceans that bring us together, that separate with

a nihilism that eats the oxygen from the water, from the skies, leaving blue the color of guns, of corpse. Water can be deep and voiceless. We can need it. We are almost over the bridge now.

VANESSA HODGE

It's Okay

Just because I don't choose your way
Doesn't mean mine's not all right.
Just because I decide differently
Doesn't make mine less fine.
We are different people
Both heading forward
Side by Side
Finding joy and laughter
Sharing tears and pain.
Not at every moment
Will our opinions coincide,
But that doesn't make your way right
Or my way wrong.
It's okay.
And if you disagree,
Please tell me
And gladly I'll talk or listen,
But just because I'm different
Please don't presume I'm wrong.
It's okay.

The Eyes

“Have a great night,”
Her mouth says sweetly.
Her eyes look beseechingly,
Daddy, why won’t you look at me?
“May I have two scoops?”
She gazes at her father lovingly.
A quick, “Sure,” and a twenty reply
As the father looks at his hands or around the store.
The brother, excited over new toys,
Quickly passes more bills to me.
She watches quietly, eating her ice cream.
Daddy, why won’t you look at me and tell me I’m okay?

CARLA JOHNSON

*for M
with apologies to Milan Kundera*

This city is yours, even though we
have never been here together,
this sometimes paradise of
rainbow-sailed regatta
bright beach umbrellas
sunlight stretched out like a
pubescent girl
the void
the light
the light the
light the unbearable lightness
of dalliances played against
a seemingly weightless sea.

Seven floors up I check the balcony joists;
would it be possible to plunge
into the void of haze and light,
longing too much for something
that never really was, though
it appears before me like a phantom
of the day.

From the Friday night bandshell
again the Reggae band
as certain as
the daily mail, the calls, the cards
tangibles
light years ago. Far from home
you anchor the neon stripes of restless hotel nights,
the mindless recollections
the sad little dream
the welcome weight of remembering.

A Postcard from Daytona Beach

My dear, wish you were here
to see the full moon above
the pink and turquoise twilight pier,
the red carnival lights and
effervescent slate gray sea.

Little boys in T-shirts skate a circled walk,
I hear the clack clack of their boards and
incessant carnie tunes as I sleep
these nevertheless wondrous nights
of sea air and seabird sounds.

Waves move in and out, the tidal rhythms
of another summer, another sea:
Dover, where we spoke of Arnold's inspiration,
his sea of faith,
as though it could change the connivance of man.

It is always summer where I see
in the watercolor cast of memory
the cavernous station where
you turn away, walk through the gate,
never turning back, yet returning,
returning,
tidally returning
in this picture as familiar as the garish moon,
as strange as the youthful clack of boards
beneath the room where
this summer I sleep alone.

We have history, as they say,
lust or love a fire that burns
like the Tiki torch below—
a fabrication of this flawed but precious world.

The Forgotten Glass

In the dark night
rain condensed on windows
as on a forgotten water glass.
She sat, feeling hot as a whore
cheaply given to a
forgotten ritual ripped
from erotic novels she had read,
pages crimson to touch,
better left alone.

Long ago a toddler on her trike
came upon her sister raking leaves,
the remnants of autumn's fires
time seemed not to exist
in the face of failing light.
Leaves crushed beneath her feet
and she rolled, close to earth,
as leaves rose like ripped-out pages
from an unread book,
then fell again.

There's much to be said for maturity,
a lifetime landscape, a chiaroscuro painting
that you finally own. Yet, yours
is the only story you will ever know.
Why sacrifice the sunlight to
the night, the darkness, the risk?
Spring rain leaves its mark
on walks, on cars, on windows
of lighted places, the easy choice.
But it is too late, just too late,
to stop the long fall of leaves.
His insistent lips, fingers, tongue,
contradictory words from pages
singed by autumn's light.
She sat with her red pumps in his hands
and watched him lift her feet.

The Road

Road: Sanskrit, Fourth Century BC: the mark left upon the ground by a moving person or object. Cherokee: nv-no-hi

He's on stage now, leaving me at a small round table in the back of the smoke-filled Texas bar. A neon Budweiser sign reflects upside down in drops of condensation on the tabletop, fifty tiny pools of burnt orange. When I take a drink I can see him through the thick bottom of my glass, through the clear finger of Seagram's, as he picks the guitar strings.

I've attracted two groupies, Ron and Shadow, who've ingratiated themselves at my table. Shadow is five months pregnant, and won't stop talking about her previous miscarriages as she sips from a tall club soda. The wedge of lime biting the rim has a black spot shaped like a comma. They've chosen the name Heroine for their baby and this bothers me in a way I can't even begin to voice. So of course I ask, why Heroine? Why that name?

Because she's saved us. And they turn to each other and giggle. They are wearing matching maroon T-shirts with my husband's logo screen-printed across the chest: Paul Seivers in big, bold lettering, underlined with a twisting, funhouse-mirror guitar.

My husband, on stage, guitar in his arms like a lover, foreplay in front of a hundred people. Close my eyes and the minor key chords reverberate through the microphone, pulsing through my glass of whiskey, soaking through my skin. Then he begins to sing and I can hear his voice all the way to my spine, it sinks in, it leaves indelible etchings on the bone.

This is how I love him best. This is the only way I love him. His weight's ballooned to nearly two-ninety and when he smiles, his face stretches into a wide grin that is no longer recognizable. But the voice, that voice that can travel around a room of unfiltered cigarette smoke and the smell of puke in the hallway and the haze of blue-collar despair like it knows all the sorrows of a life and can ease yours if you'll just stay and listen a minute.

The song ends and the crowd claps and hoots. Neon is flickering off Shadow's braces, blurring the movement of her mouth.

I squint at her teeth as they flash and pop with the colors of the bar's liquor signs. She's saying something about her folic acid intake but the Seagram's has pulled a blessed veil down over my eyes and ears. My skeleton still vibrates with the final notes of the last song.

Then, two chords, a pause, another, and the crowd rushes in one voice together, whispering, excited, tumbling over each other. Paul calls out, "This' for my wife's twin brother, missing in Mexico since ninety-nine. May have heard it on the radio." Three quick strums, and as he begins to pluck out the prelude, I mouth along with him, "God bless you, man, wherever you are."

Ron and Shadow look at me expectantly, smiling; she's digging in her canvas purse and comes up with a Bic. A waitress swoops by with a tray of beers, her hoop earrings catching staccatos of light as she nods her head and shouts, "I love this song!"

The lighters burn clean holes through the cigarette smoke. Paul starts in on his one Top 40 Adult Contemporary hit from four years ago, "The Road," and the crowd sings along.

From Dallas to Oklahoma City to Ft. Smith, up to Tulsa and over to Kansas City, for three minutes and thirty-eight seconds a night he owns the room. Shadow's braces gleam in the glow from the lighters.

*When that road not taken
Had taken you away
I knew you loved the road
I sang good-bye to all those days*

Shadow is warbling along, her eyes closed, one hand on her pregnant stomach, the other high in the air with the lighter. She has a mole on her left eyelid that is well hidden when she's looking straight ahead. I take another drink, swallow back the fire, squint at my husband through the bottom of the glass.

*But can you really love a road
Can you take it in your hands
Will it love you the way I do
Or sift through your fingers like desert sand*

I never listen to the words anymore, just the voice.

Later that night, Paul Seivers is snoring alone in the claustrophobic bed, and I wake from a nightmare on the RV's tiny, hard couch, sit up straight blooming with sweat. I've dreamed of a baby named Heroine, whose sharp, tiny teeth have left track marks up and down my arms.



*Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.*

—Robert Frost

The summer that Jeffrey didn't come back from Mexico, it fell to me to go and find him. So I flew to San Antonio and drove to Coahuila in a green rental car. Here, where the Mexican government has purchased several acres of desert surrounding Sequoyah's grave, I listened for rattlesnakes and looked for my brother.

My search took me further south and I stayed with a college friend in Mexico City. The city bristled with grime and tenseness—broken glass topping hacienda gate walls like icy, crushed diamonds. Down in Oaxaca, coffee in the sun on a rooftop set the nation's pulse on display beneath me—horns, hip-hop blasting from radios, popcorn and taco vendors, and small children selling candy below. I scanned the face of strangers and watched for my brother: light-skinned, long-haired, one-sixty-fourth Cherokee. Wouldn't he sense me here?

I bought avocados and bananas in the marketplace for breakfast. I rode horseback through the Chiapas countryside where women and children washed huge stacks of cilantro and lemons in the river. I washed my own insides with the heart of the blue agave. Bless me, agave, for I have sinned. My search for Jeffrey stretched all the way to the watery Guatemalan border—the last place he'd posted a letter.

We had both been studying English at OU, but junior year while I deconstructed Frost's anti-modernistic poems, Jeffrey dropped out and started immersing himself in Cherokee heritage classes. Then he started immersing himself in meth, progressed to heroin, and his skin shrank like an apple in the sun. My brother came to believe that Sequoyah's final prophecy pertained to him, that he was the Cherokee child meant to make his way to the great leader's tomb in Mexico, carry forth Sequoyah's spirit's message of brotherhood and unity, and make the Cherokee nation great again. The road called to him, sang in his dreams at night, begging him to come and fulfill the prophecy, find the tomb at the end of the White Path.

I reminded him of the Indian card in his wallet behind the Visa, damning him to be forever only a small percentage Tsa-la-gi.

He'd quote Chief Charles R. Hicks, *No amount of white blood shall dilute the pride of the Cherokee people.* Green eyes incensed.

Christmas came and went, I returned alone. My mom and dad shot Jeff's name down every spidery tributary of the prayer chain at the First Baptist Church in Tulsa. Jeff's girlfriend, Melissa Missers, would call me up and cry. Not a word, just her sobs bouncing from cell tower to cell tower across the prairie while I ate Cheerios in the RV outside some bar.

Mourning a twin must be like losing a limb. You feel the constant ghost pain of it, gnawing at the stub of bone, your skin too stubborn to believe such a thing could happen and therefore unable to heal cleanly over the broken flesh.

Once, we held each other for nine straight months. Every cell feels the absence of Jeffrey.

Did my brother mourn me? Did he write poems for me? Did the road or the Mexican black tar or the promise of being the chosen Cherokee child take my place?

Paul took a poem I wrote, toned down the melodrama, whispered to his guitar, and came up with his one radio hit. We take this freak show from town to town: *Helloooo, Texarkana! This is what it sounds like to lose a brother! Listen closely, sing along, feel my pain, buy a Paul Seivers CD!*

From a laptop in my rolling home, I research my own language, mythology, and culture on the Internet, visiting chat rooms and message boards, looking for a sign, a clue, a dropped red bead to show me my brother's been there.

I emailed Dr. R. Edward Tenkiller, a Cherokee professor at NSU in Tahlequah who'd mentored Jeffrey a short time. *Your brother is nadanvtesgvna, a free thinker, you must let him go.*

Not the inspiration I was looking for.

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood/ And sorry I could not travel both/



*I will draw thorns from your feet.
We will walk the White Path of Life together.
Like a brother of my own blood,
I will love you.
I will wipe tears from your eyes.
When you are sad,
I will put your aching heart to rest.
—Cherokee Traveler's Blessing*

Thursday night, St. Patrick's Day, Lander's Tavern in Fayetteville, Arkansas: the beer is green and the air hangs heavy with stale odors. It's nearly one-thirty a.m. and Paul has yet to play, "The Road." Crowd's getting restless, talking among themselves. Happy hour is long come and gone and we all recognize the mendacity in each other in the way our black mascara smudges into the lines under our eyes, the way our drooping cowboy hats shadow our yellowed, alcoholic faces, the way we count the hours until we must go home.

I'm outside with a cigarette in the back alley beside a chain link fence. Smoking's allowed inside Lander's, but a slice of cold night air called to me. I've slipped my wedding ring off and put it on my thumb, examining its brilliance in the shrouded moonlight as the Camel grows shorter between my lips. Reverberations of the drums and bass rattle the metal back door. Paul's splitting the cover tonight with a couple of friends, hoping they'll take up some slack on stage, he's been tired.

The March wind chews right through my thin T-shirt. A fine mist begins sifting onto my face, cold as peppermint. I exhale through my nose and the moon-washed colors of the cigarette smoke roil in the air like ocean waves. Could Jeffrey be watching this same moon? Goosebumps erupt up and down my arms and I lean against the brick building and rake my fingers through sticky hair.

Inside, I stumble through the half-lit hallway around the pay phone. Two people, bodies entwined as they dance and move toward the bathrooms, bump into me and spin and recover and continue fumbling past. My path is strewn with smashed popcorn and wet patches shiny as oil.

Paul's winding down "Soliloquy," a complicated piece he wrote six months ago that is yet to catch on. A smattering of applause. A tray of drinks smashes to the floor.

I take my seat behind the table of T-shirts and CD's and raise my empty glass to the waitress so she'll bring me another. Paul stops and picks up the Michelob on the ground beside his chair. The drummer and bass player stumble off the stage and thread their way through the dissipating crowd to the bar.

"One last song," Paul says, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand and settling the empty bottle back on the floor. He moves the guitar's neck up and down and the bar patrons all hold their breaths. "For my wife," he says.

The drink the waitress has brought is halfway to my mouth

when he starts playing, and this chord progression is not familiar. I notice, with the fresh Seagram's in my grasp, that the wedding ring still encircles my thumb.

Then Paul Seivers is singing a song to me alone. To me. People are looping purses over their shoulders, making sure wallets are still intact, shoving chairs under tables, and calling to each other. Overhead lights flicker on in coughing fits of harsh yellow while Paul sings of loneliness and heartache and beauty, how life is both tragic and perfect at the same time. How he sees tragedy and perfection in me. I listen. Close my eyes and listen for once to what he wants to tell me. Stop and breathe and draw the thorns from my feet.

Can you really love a road?

Can you take it in your hands and wring the rain from it in places where the water's settled like pools of glass?

Can you really love a road? A brother? A husband? Can you wring the tears from your Cherokee twin who must remain lost in order to find himself or from a singer-songwriter up on stage at Lander's Bar in Fayetteville, Arkansas?

Maybe some of us were meant to vanish on the road, always walking toward the next high place, the next promise, clutching our string of red beads for luck. Maybe some of us were meant to be found on the road, sought out and saved by a song, holding our glass like an amulet against the dark, leaving marks in the dust behind.

LYDIA GAYLE JOHNSON

Ode to Helen

The cemetery lady creeps
Like the dead to the doorway
On her way out,

Grave goods
Papier-mâché glare
Of San Antonio

Over the black, black dress
Hunching on shoulders
Stooped to a crawl wary crawl

Imperious
Irascible
Immortal

A phoenix from the graveyard home
Emerging, yearly castigating those
Who trample across the stones.

MATT JONES

‘89

27 miles to the gallon,
0-60 sometimes,
3 flats and 2 blown radiators,
busted water pump and a shredded timing belt,
holey hoses, and corroded mufflers

all for the sake of ...

She's been round' the country,
from Long Island to Baton Rouge, and...
She's my season's pass to life.

with a full tank of regular unleaded
and a endless dotted yellow line...
it's all too familiar to my old 89'

She's brought me 200,000 miles to this
rusty stop sign and abandoned luncheonette
She's brought me to...
to where I am today.

leaking oil, balding tires and, the transmission you ask?
we won't go there!

yes, She's tired, yet still ready for adventure,
every day reminded of Journeys past.
where Her trunk latch was busted by a paddle,
and Her fender fell off in a back-country ditch.

She dreams of weekends and summer
where She'll be loaded down with bikes and kayaks,
and new battle scars.
just like the chipped windshield and faded rubber,
she longs only for more “wounds” to define her legend.

Yes, She's taken me places...
from the Thursday I turned 16,
She, with her flip up headlights,
and, long since stolen, lack of radio,
has provided a shade.

on long solo drives to the mountains,
and trips to visit family,
She's been there, pressing on.

windows down, and windblown hair,
this is how the cookie crumbled,
this is how we met.
and, when the window motor blew
from too much action,
I knew We had something special!

23 miles to the gallon now,
but I'm OK with that!

A Full Canvas

no Jib, no spinnaker
only a single bamboo mast,
with a large rhombus main.
a five person crew,
rounding the last buoy

glaring sun on their backs
and a strong front blowing in from the...
yes! From the west!

The change in the weather stirs the seas,
above and below the surface.
but only momentarily,
the turmoil subsides.

they now ride the smooth melodic waves...
tacking up-wind, only to fall off,
with the journey's next puff

living life with bulging sails.

On this piece of canvas
adventure is painted-
with the spray of sea salt,
faded thread,
wispy winds of the changing seasons,
and the feeling of the ever-setting sun.

SABRINA JUREY

Artificiality or What's Wrong with a Real Candle?

It's 10:20 am, and the bells go off again. Bells? Wait, that's a recording, played over the loudspeaker. We don't actually have bells. Twenty minutes they ring, chiming in "Let There Be Peace On Earth" and "Lift High The Cross" and other proper Lutheran hymns.

It reminds me of the day we discovered the off switch to the Christ candle—the ever-burning candle to remind us of Christ's constant presence—in the sanctuary of that Lutheran church in Los Angeles.

Red Eyes and Memories

It's really a bad photograph
of me and you—rainy and dark,
and out of focus. We're sprawled
out on my bed, our heads at the foot
and our feet up by my pillows.

Lying in front of us, on top
of the Mexican blanket that
adorns the end of my bed, is a folder
of college stuff, I think.

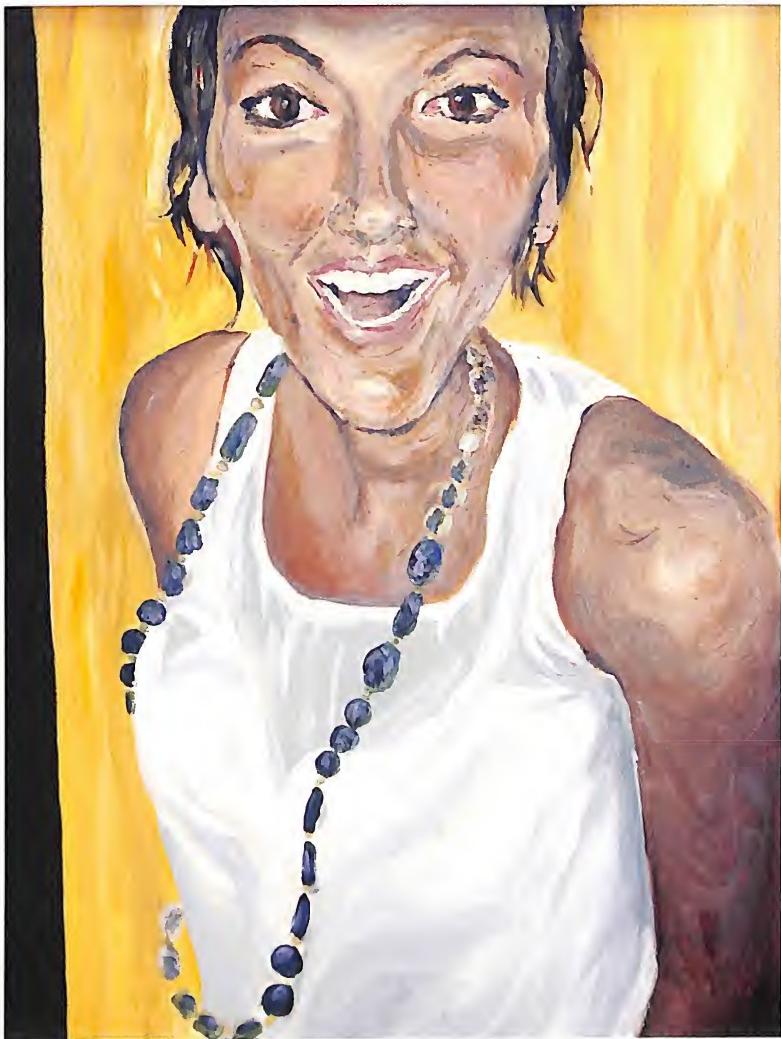
We were high school juniors,
after all; this was the time of the
influx of university catalogues.

We're looking at the
photographer, you grinning,
me looking somewhat less than
amused, both with the
devilish red-eye that
seems inevitable these days.
What ever possessed
my mother to grab my camera
and snap that picture?

We were so close back then,
two peas in a pod, to be cliche.
I look back on those days
with a sad sort of smile
and think “You know, I
really should e-mail her.”
And hopefully, if I remember
while I'm sitting at the
computer, I will.

EMILY BOAN

Self-Portrait



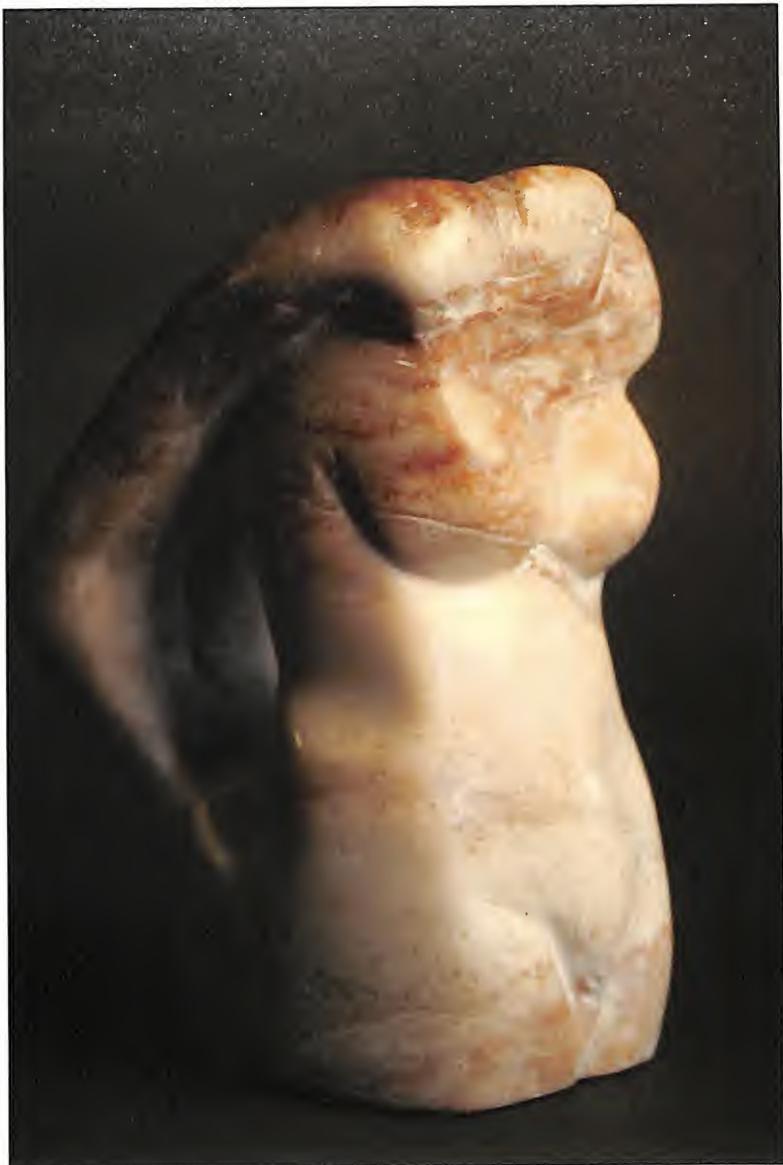
KATIE BRYANT

Wall and Shadow



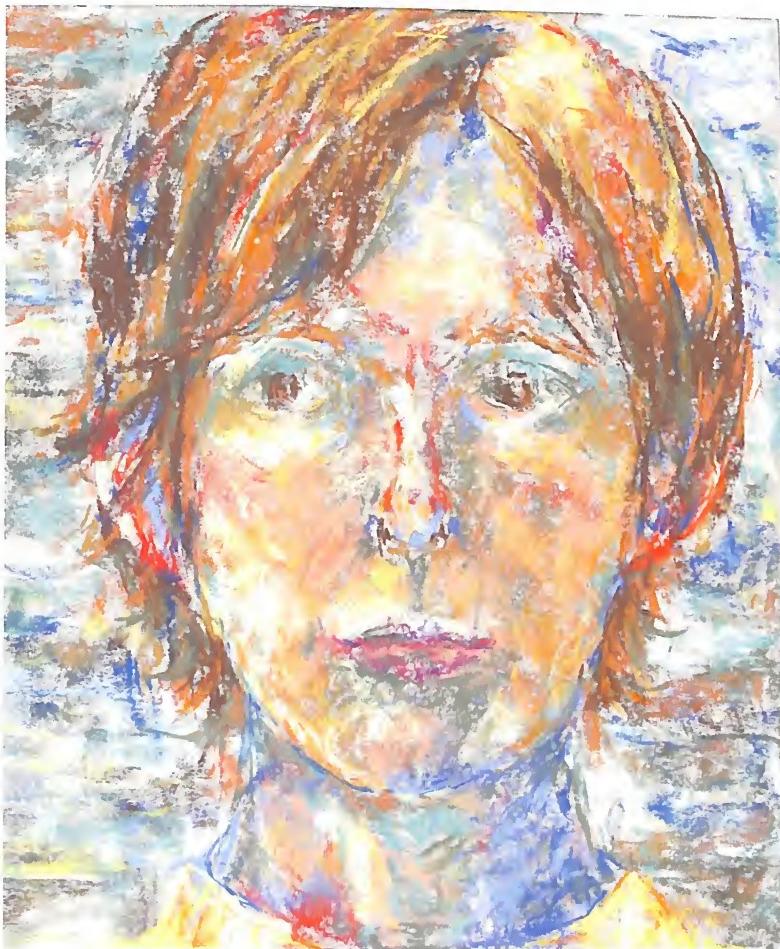
LAURA GIBSON

Figure Study, Carved Alabaster



JESSICA HARRIS

Menta



KRYSTINA SIGMON

Escape from Life



EMILY SLAUGHTER

Cleveland Fair



Moonice



THOMAS TWIGGS

Self-Portrait, Collage



One Moment

She had been waiting for
This moment
All her life.
It was thrilling.
Beautiful and sparkling,
The cut was flawless.

He had anticipated
This moment
All his life.
It was terrifying.
One wrong move and
They'd make the final cut.

This woman praying for a diamond
A symbol of her beloved's love,

This man mining diamonds in Africa
A helpless worker fearing for his life.

Her tears overflowing with joy,
She hugged him to her,
Her hand now adorned with coveted rarity.

His tears beginning to seep out,
He was left alone to mourn.
A limb lost for a girl's best friend.

NOEL MARSHALL

Premature

They call my name yet I cannot find these voices.
It's dark and smoky as I climb.
Each night the same thing.
I can never reach the voices
as they press gently on my finger tips.
Mystery and wonder,
why does this happen?
Who calls my name?
Why are they hiding in the dusk as I ascend this unending stair case?
I feel them touching my small fragile finger tips
yet they are not visible to my unadjusted eyes.
Caring voices, I'm not afraid,
each night the same thing.
They haunt me though I am calm and warm.
There's no escaping the incubator.

For years these nightly occurrences.
A premature birth, they fill my dreams.
An Incubator, parents' hands and voices.
An infant searching to escape a prison.

MAUREEN E. MURPHY

The Final Amen

Silence exhales slowly.
Its spent breath levying a coldness
that bores through my bones
and fractures all sensation.

Your answer becomes incarnate;
a corpse for me to mourn.

Tomorrow I will buy black
to sponsor my sorrowful countenance;
costuming grief's climate
in onion prayers and pity's cordials.

After which I will arrange the funeral:
asking Solomon to deliver the eulogy
and the cardinals to choir
a scarlet threnody.

And for the burial,
I will hire Hamlet's gravediggers
to spade cyan comedy
over memory's iron casket.

Lost love deserving
of a salient good-bye.

A Matter of Details

November's night landslides,
free-falling into fog's vise
and an apocalyptic cold
that rattles bones
and tastes of swords and sayonaras.

I ghost the city streets,
racing past chthonic props
of waxy neons and turnstile corridors,
each one secured by carnal merchants—
who pose in familiar detail,
uniformed in high-strapped heels,
cheap leathers and faux furs—
peddling blue flesh for money's warmth
and broken stones of chemical faith.

And on an empty corner,
a cathedral rises from the shadows,
darkened and padlocked against intrusion;
unwilling to anoint my mission
with light or catechism;

declaring me blasphemous and heretical—
without a credible license
to be love's courier or cavalry.

Still, I am not deterred;
determined I must rescue you
from tripping over hollow legends
and submitting to the eternal sleep
that subdues all headless horsemen.

Your eccentric clues
serving as my subliminal shepherd:

the wizard's monocle cast in the garbage
and the bundle of your Belgian letters—
still strongly scented with patchouli oil
and Flanders' poppies.

JANEY PEASE

Viney Grove Storm

shadow valley blue
with maze
 of angled clouds
 uneven haze
wedged
 to hills with broken arcs
stormy sweet
in perfect art

Album

sorting
through pictures
like God
rummaging through time
in omniscient disorder

here the newborn
clean eyed
with hope
now
a mother
dazed
with the last tears
wrung out

so many stories--
he was killing her
she was dying for lack of love
she committed suicide
she tried
she threatened
she died

God
who are these
firecracker people
whose Fourth of July lives
exploded
full of love
and died

they are my brothers

my sisters
my friends

here i knew love would last
here it died

Faded Chantreuse

Faded chanteuse
Sitting at the mirror —
Your looks are weathered
But they'll still do.

Soft lighting and
The right make-up
Still give the virgin's blush.

When you were young
You had everything before you,
And you took as much as you could

No regrets, no hard feelings —
The work is harder now
And tomorrow still comes

The looks are weathered
But the skills are honed now —
Faded chanteuse
Sitting at the mirror.

DANIEL ROBINSON

Soft Light Through a Shingle Crack

for Sandra Lea

Your letter reminded me of our first home.

Hovel of a shack with holes in the floor,
Some from age and rot and
Some from where Rory took a double-bit axe
And drunkenly tried to kill a mouse at midnight.

No locks on the doors, even if you cold shut them
Tight against prowling raccoons.
No glass in most windows, just holes in the walls,
And St. Helens deposited her blanket of grey ash
While we drank cheap wine in darkness.

A mattress on the floor,
A cushion-less couch and bulging chair,
Arms threadbare like roadmaps under previous lives,
A car radio wired to a converter.
Life was simple.

No address, no road, in the middle of an orchard—A place,
Front leaning to the north and the back opposite,
Inclined like the rest of the valley toward the river.
Loving in high grass under opening apple trees.

Your letter held the lightness of memory and of time.

The lightness
 of glades of light through a shingle crack.
The lightness
 of the last breath of a low wind.
The lightness
 Of one question in the mystery.

The lightness of a tongue whispering the first word of morning.

Route 12 South of Trinidad

A key slips within the lock of sleep to unfold
This horizon, luxuriant and glazed, a purple-veined spider web
Above the city. Weightless as a child
Waiting for his mother's arms.

Veils shrink and dissolve and disappear
Into a call of the high wind.
Light plays, tense though soft, against shards of water.
Silver wafers bounce as if wet from sweat.

West spreads out—it could be the world—
Dreams lay end on end with fingers touching,
Anticipating a first smell of new sage,
The numb of raw yarrow and wheat bleached in the sun.

Days butts against darkness
With clouds pawed in the sky
By a dying buck shot through the neck.
A high ceiling of sky with a hundred beginnings lost.

That nailed cross outlined
On a lonely fence post with strands of rusted wire.
With Route 12 south of Trinidad—broken dreams,
Faded mysteries, hopeless pasts
Rise into the Sangre de Christo's.

TRUDY ROTH

White Dresses

Her baptismal dress,
soft baby sleeves
with
tiny embroidery
on the scalloped hem.
And white.

Her communion dress,
puffy sleeves
with
ribbons and bows
and tiers of frilly lace.
And white.

Her prom dress,
sophisticated and sleeveless
with
a swirling skirt and satin bow
streaming down the back.
And white.

Her wedding dress,
long-sleeved
with
layers of lace and embroidery
on the scalloped train in the back.
And white

Her burial dress,
plain.
And white.

MEGAN RYGEL

megileigh

Sure I think about you now and then, but it's been a long long time. I've got a good life now; I've moved on, so when you cross my mind, I try not to think about what might've been, 'cause that was then, and we have taken different roads. We can't go back again; there's no use giving in, and there's no way to know what might have been. We can sit and talk about this all night long, and wonder why we didn't last. Yes, they might be the best days we will ever know, but we'll have to leave them in the past.

- *shenandoah*

three years come and gone now, and
i tried tonight to explain how i feel.
thinking, i
thought some more, and realized:
there are no words to say.

not to explain how we coordinated –
all those classes, so many
i remember:
trig, english, theatre, chem.
all together, we'd help with mutual assignments,
wondering when they were going to
get interesting, wondering when
we'd both find a challenge
in this world we called high school.

but school was not the most of it, and
afternoons were ours –we'd drive home,
recapping the one or two classes we hadn't
been together –
i made a new friend, you learned a new sign –
then went to the shed, fed guinea pigs,
admired each other's: the fur on your peruvians,
the markings on my americans, and my latest venture – coronets.
it was all years ago.

then we'd come in, do homework together,
eat dinner together, and sometimes i
would attempt to get some alone time –
heading to my room, i would
shut the door and log on to the computer,
and write.

poetry, fiction, short stories, it didn't matter –
it never worked.

a knock, two, and i'd grudgingly
open my door
and those moments i saw
who you really were –
vulnerable,
delicate,
wise.

you'd sit on my bed and i'd try to ignore you,
still wanting that time to myself.
i never learned – you always won.
you'd whine – all for quality time, you were –
and i'd pause, you'd seize the moment,
say something funny –

which was all i needed for an excuse to run
and jump on the bed, and
sometimes
i'd tickle you, we'd wrestle, and i always won,
'cause you were weak, and frail –
or sometimes we'd sit quietly, and i'd play
with your glossy, soft, beautiful hair –
strawberry blonde braids sticking out at
all angles, we'd laugh as i fastened them –
with twis-ties.

eight-thirty: bedtime for you, so you'd say goodnight,
go to bed, and i'd stay up past eleven, working on what
you had distracted me from earlier, yet
somehow it was always worth it.
by twelve, as i drifted to sleep, you'd

knock again, and
whisper about your bad dreams, and
climb in bed with me, where everything
seemed to be okay – for both of us –
and all was well
until morning, when
it all began again, the same
as the day before.

it was high school, we were young,
innocent yet touched
by the world around us, and
forever affected by each other
more than we'll ever know –
yet, once a year, i reflect –
wondering where you are, i
get a flash of our past

and i
sometimes wonder why i don't
dwell on it more often, but
the answer comes to me quickly –
you
were my life
and regretting, even thinking,
is too painful.

so i have dwelled sufficiently for the year,
and i know, though i cry now, i will not wonder
again – what if – for a long time, and part of that
makes me ache more, but part of it
is a relief
and all i really know
is

three years come and gone, and
i still miss you.

forgive

Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.
- colossians

*I'm weak; I'm poor; I'm broken, Lord,
but I'm yours. Hold me now.*
- jennifer knapp

my head's still too big
and my heart's still too weak
but my soul, somehow

has grown –
blossoming as a butterfly would,
into vibrant colours

of light
and when i feel it –
see it –

i know that nothing
is as important as this:
forgiveness

and humility
so with my heart held high
and my head down low

i smile mildly
my soul meek
and i ask:

forgive me,
i say, for i
am merely

a flower –
blossoming, but not yet
reached its full

potential
and not yet
always performing

right, i sometimes
make mistakes
so
forgive me.

LYNN VEECH SADLER

Menus for a Real Field Day

She had “organizational skills”
before they were in for men,
much less “us.”

Starting at 4:30, she cooked
a full breakfast for our family—
“scratch” biscuits included—
and then the barn-day/generic
field-day “dinner” before leaving for
the field or tobacco barn herself.

She returned home a bit before noon
to see it served,
cleaned up afterwards
(no paper plates),
then went back to the field.

The family did eat leftovers
for “supper,” but they were warm.
Her food was largely
home-canned, shelled, peeled,
laboriously attended.

I learned my organizational skills
from Mother,
parlayed them into
a college presidency.

Call me Doubting Thomas[ine]:
I don’t believe perspicacity
first gave computers “menus.”
Menus are from others
like my mother—
the purest icons.

SHANA SANDERS

Fallen Star

Now I see the flash of red
Against a backdrop of velvet night sky
Warning flags held up in the distance
Shrill alarms echo through the night
Gradually I feel a stirring in the sands of time.

Here I lay, palms upright
Directed towards the heavens
My hands are stained with ashes and soot
Permanently marred by paths undergone
And by the feet that have carried them.
Regardless, I reach across the abyss
To catch you, falling star.

Frozen now, in my minds eye
I see your lonely face
Desperation etches your features with pain
Scarcely masked now by suspended neutrality.
How I long to hold, to hug, to save you with my darkened flesh
For I too once was a fallen star
Who crawled along the earth.

I see you falling; my heart cries out
My hands ball into fists.
For though I see the dark path ahead. . .

I don't know how to save you.

Suburban Jungle

I grew up in a fairy tale,
mother invented lions and tigers
beneath the kitchen table. There were
panther sightings in the living room
at midnight. The roof opened to palm trees
and pomegranates. Mangoes and coconuts
dangled from the lamps. Screams
were muffled by growling lions,
hootings owls, howling wolves,
the laughter of kings and queens,
the spinning of gold in the basement,
fairy tales banishing every argument.

6:30, After the Children Go

I have waited years for this:
the yellow bus lights pulling into the distance,
children and their backpacks tucked away for the day,
the lift of mist and fog, a single bird gliding
across new light, one lone jogger passing by
sleep evident in his half-closed eyes.

Even the dogs are silent, their barks trapped
between dark houses and dreams, birdsong caught in the
songbird's throat. I lift warm coffee to my lips
sip slowly at morning's stillness, breathe out.

Exploding Toads

As many as 1,000 toad had swelled to bursting point and exploded in recent days

-Yahoo News

Toads are exploding in Germany
bloating and splatting beside the pond,
maybe they've had enough of the muck
and sludge of days, the monotonous
buzz of flies, the sameness of place and scent
and living others, the drifting directionless
water lillies, the hum drum croak and ribbid song.

There are theories floating about the pond,
crows pecking out the liver, bloating defense
incensed in the toad, leading to demise: seeping
of organs from inside out, the final popping.
Or, perhaps a virus carried in, slipped from horse to pond.

But I think this-- knowing that two-legged others
have walked off cliffs and bridges, said, "I've had enough!"
and the toads bloated with despair, the end of days,
pump up and drift into dispersion, burst in mass
into the air of chosen oblivion.

NOEL MARSHALL

Calico Memories

Needles of gold, iridescent sun beam down on me from Heaven, or beyond. Warmth melts ever so soothingly into my bare freckled shoulders; it's quiet but not still. This is a stillness that is heard through the rumpling of leaves as they meet one another far above my head in the maple and oak trees. It's the last day of my summer vacation, and she is here with me now in our woods. I don't know why I named her Oreo when she came to my house as a stray many years ago, because she is not black and white. My purring companion is exquisitely dressed in the finest golds, blacks, tans, and auburns. She is my calico cat. It is here in our still haven that we run from the clang and clutter of our hectic lives. The robin and the cardinal are singing their masterpieces as they bathe in the sun's rays, perched in treetops above. The woodpecker that is ever so diligently making his mark on the white pine in the corner of the woods (as he does every summer morning) provides me with calming familiarity while he searches for food.

We sit crunching paper-mache leaves, me between my fingers, and Oreo under her dainty paws. I know she is happy because her tiny motor runs. When I stroke her short, velvet mane her motor revs up, and as I reach her tail she lifts up her bottom and sets her motor back on cruise. Oreo's dry dimpled nose and tiny sandpaper tongue against my palm, assure me that she feels loved, and loves me in return.

When I pet her, my fingers tingle, and as this feeling travels to my heart it pumps faster, I smile – I know this is love. She smiles back and her lips remind me of worn rubber tires, smoothed by the asphalt, slick and dark. Her calico attire smells of motor oil as well. Oreo prefers her sleeping quarters under my father's 1989 Dodge mini-van, and if not there then certainly on top of one of the broken garage doors which stays up because of my father's lack of repair skills. As we sit in nature our hearts exchange the words our different languages can not.

Before us, nestled among the cozy trees, is a grave yard – my pet cemetery. It is here where those whom Oreo and I have both loved sleep under makeshift headstones that have withstood

their share of tears, both human and feline. We remember here in our peaceful haven the friends who have passed away – dogs, puppies, cats, and hamsters. I know that Oreo is crying now because her motor has ceased to run. She seems to stare at the headstone which marks the loss of one of her children. The stillness here brings joy in life and sorrow in remembrance. Our only friend that has not been laid to rest in the pine and spruce-filled grave yard is Chance the chinchilla, who was buried at the veterinarian's office. Oreo has been with me through them all. Others have come running to me in the cold green grass and left before I could say good-bye, but my Oreo has had a very long life. She has slept under the mini-van for sixteen years, I have cooked her noodles once a week since we met (Oreo has always refused to eat anything but plain noodles) and she knows each of them who rest here before us in the cemetery. I stroke my purring baby as she scratches her cheek on a nearby rotting stump, the remainder of a towering oak tree that fell one stormy evening, crushing the garage.

I know we will always be here, Oreo and I, in our woods, our thinking place, even when we too must separate. I don't know if I will be able to say good-bye, but I know she will dream of rustling leaves when she one day must be put to rest amongst her animal family. I plan on making her headstone the biggest; it will be a rock, or concrete brick, whichever I can find. We exit our woods, leaving our sorrows behind with the woodpecker. I have her now in the summer sun, and I am comforted to know that she and I will be able to share these moments for as long as she lives, but she is very old, and I can only pray that she stays with me until we can once again embark down the wooded path, on our journey of comfort and peacefulness. I take a picture of this moment in my memory, one of many; I know somehow that this could be our last walk together.

I had seventeen years of calming walks with my calico cat. Then one day as the winter was getting crisp and cotton clouds hovered above those all too familiar trees, I found her lifeless. She had waited on me to return home from college, on my Christmas break, and as the soot-like earth fell from my father's shovel, I wrapped her in her navy blanket (the one she slept on each night) and laid her to rest. This was her blanket for warmth in life, and I could only hope that it would warm her frame six-feet under the soil. My soul mate and best friend would no longer romp the pebbled dirt path to sit with me in my pet cemetery. No, that day a new dark hole in the solemn woods became her eternal home.

It has been almost a year since I lost her, and I have just now been able to gather enough courage to walk down the leaf streamed path alone. As I approach my makeshift pet cemetery, Oreo's gravestone seems to be the only one that is not covered completely with the autumn leaves. Then the emotions flood back into my heart of our past walks, of our quiet embraces, and of my long time best friend. I now sit alone as my skin tingles from the cool breeze, and I remember our last stroll before the end of summer.

LYDIA SKIDMORE

She

She's a nightmare.

She's sawdust on your Cheerios.

She's Sprite when you thought you'd grabbed water.

She's Tabasco sauce that only looks like Ketchup.

All this and more she is,

Or isn't.

If there is an attitude to be had, she's got it

In the look, in the word, in the lack thereof.

And yet,

As I walked beside her holding her hand,

I met a very different little girl.

She was a cool breeze on an autumn night.

She was the softest velvet blanket you could ever hope for.

She was my friend.

“Who made the stars, Amanda?” I asked as we walked under them.

“Um...he did.

Simple”

“And who is he?”

She did nothing more than point heavenward.

I smiled, enjoying her presence for the first time ever.

And this is what I know.

I am called to no more than this —

Faith like a child.

ALLEN SMITH

Arroyo Rojo

Cells swap places as if sand
down the drain of capillaries
into rivers red as desert rocks
through bones dry as arroyos
though filled no slower than
the mind or heart.

The Bighorn

The bighorn,
rocky mountain or desert, I'm not sure which,
is my sister.

I saw her briefly, high above,
its horns in some outlandish tangle,
suggesting the need for a good combing,
and my eyes obliged,
running across it from horn to hoof.

Silent and inquisitive, yes,
but not passive like a ewe.
There always was something restless about her,
stepping here, there,
on some rocky outcropping,
bald as her expression.

DAVID STARNES

Sunday Morning

Glancing at you from the next room,
your naked back to me, your hair
a lively mess from love and little sleep,
I thought of Edward Hopper's nudes,
those solitary women in the morning light,
their flesh as pale as bedding,
their pallid bodies lined with reckoning.

I turned away before you rose to dress.
I'd viewed all that my eyes could save,
as much of you as vulnerable and spent
as you'd have wished to bare,
after the earlier weight of you
below me and above me,
and the weightlessness.

In Recovery

A chain link fence divides my back yard
from the grounds of the hospital.
Kudzu coupling with the fence prevents
a clearer view of those who are drying out.
Most afternoons and early evenings some

of the residents whoop it up at volleyball,
with cheers and applause for every point.
On staggered occasions some of them
shoot hoops, as the irregular
percussion of backboard and ball resounds

across my yard where squirrels, like referees
disoriented or deranged, now feint, now freeze.
Only a rain dissuades the residents
from coming out, and even then the courts
amount to puddles when the games resume.

I hear the echoes decades old
of summer camp, of pickup games
in nameless neighborhoods, in these
fresh voices rising from a volley, from a shot.
As evening dims the residents return

indoors and all I hear are ice cubes
dwindling in the glass I raise. I think
I'll pour another drink before
I think too well of those across the way,
those in recovery, unlike our own,

since you and I live unassisted
in our thirst and muddle through
despite addictions to the beautiful,
a lust for the renewable.
We're hooked on flesh and blood, we crave our usual.

Not Another Love Poem

I've heard that life goes on
so often I'm beginning to believe
it's a conspiracy against the living
or those of us who'd just as soon

have life get on with it.
I'd rather all along have heard
so often I'd believe that love
goes up in flames impossible to douse,

that love wears down to dust our names
called out in vain, no use
remembering the lost, no cure
in drink or drugs or Sunday services.

So I believe because I have
no other late night remedies,
no fresh epiphanies at dawn,
that love, believe me, makes the world

go round the bend, love messes up
the order of the stars, upsetting sun
and moon, and stretching gravity to such
abuse it's all a soul can do to get
it on, and up, and over with.

Grayson Visits the Children's Museum

At six months wise he enters
in his stroller through the child-sized door
between the standard entrance and exit.
I hunch down slightly just behind him.

I prefer to be perceived as aging child
than settle for the limits of adulthood.
Inside, it's childhood on a tear,
with art and science at the wheel.

In one room we inhale the worldview of Crayola;
in the next, wild boys construct
and deconstruct their brick-sized Lego
buildings tall as chests of drawers.

We linger near the simulated weather
threatening a boat-sized boat.
It's piloted by mutinous apprentices
whose average age is five.

We find a quiet corner by a window
where younger mothers nurse and played out
children nap.
Grayson contemplates the trees outside.
He's fascinated by the motioning of leaves.

He's moved to smile, as if the light of day
held promises, held all there is to grow into, to know.

JESS SNYDER

Luncheon on the Grass

“I’ve seen you before.”

The man on the train next to me looked around him. “*Pardon moi?*” he said, touching his chest.

I smiled vaguely, trying to place him. “I’ve seen you before. Your face. Do you visit many art museums?”

“*Oui*,” he said, brown eyes lighting up at me. “I love art museums. They are like home to me.”

“Home,” I repeated. Paintings flitted through my head: huge, framed battle scenes by Delacroix; Renoir’s filmy dances; faces trapped on paper in Wyeth’s sketches; Michelangelo’s *David*, towering and serene.

His eyes, bright and warm, watched my face. “You think hard. Do you like art museums?”

“Oh, yes. They are my home, too.” I glanced at my red high-tops. “I’m an artist, you know.”

He touched a finger to his angular nose. “I do know.”

That surprised me. I don’t tell strangers about myself often, but if I do, I never tell them I’m an artist. But he is different and I can’t place why.

“I see the surprise in you. You believe me brazen.”

I shook my head, smiling. “No and yes, and I don’t know why I told you.”

He held up a long finger, caressing the air beside my cheek. “No, no, *ma cherie*. You told me nothing. I know.”

“Where are you going?”

Sorrow drifted through his eyes. “Ah, I am returning home.”

I smiled. “A museum, then?”

“Yes. The Louvre.”

“May I accompany you?” I asked, hungry for English and friendship after my six months of studying French art.

Beautiful white teeth shone through his soft brown beard. He held out his hand to me as the train slowed and the doors whooshed open.

The diamond tip of the Louvre glittered, set like a gem in the green leaf of Le Parque. We walked, my hand still in his, under tree

arches and grotesque statuary frozen in time; we were silent, drawn by the urgent historical whisper of the museum.

I spent the day in his company, murmuring interesting facts and listening to his melodic accent. He caught my hand often, pressing my palm with his strong fingers.

We wound from ancient Roman sculptures, through portraits of the Renaissance, lingering among Baroque parties and Romantic landscapes. We reached the Realists' room and he stopped, fingers tightening around my hand.

"I am very near my home, *ma cherie*," he said. His nostrils flared briefly and a crease appeared between his straight brows.

"Here? This room?" I smiled at him. "This is my favorite room."

We stood in the doorway, absorbing the must of the arched gallery lined with heavy gold frames. A tiny movement began in the recesses of my mind, stirring sleepily.

He touched my chin with one long finger. "Come, *mon ami*, let us explore."

Gustave Courbet.

Bonheur's *The Horse Fair*.

The Banjo Lesson, by Henry Ossawa Tanner.

Thomas Eakins.

Olympia, Manet's prostitute, reclining in the pose of a Grecian goddess. She infuriated French society; she fascinates me. He stands behind me – I can feel his eyes on me. The movement in my mind increases, getting panicky-feeling.

I turn around and he smiles at me. "I've seen you before," I whisper; the movement in my mind becomes a flurry of agreement.

The smile on his bow lips turns sad and he nods. Silent, he points to the next painting: Manet's *Luncheon on the Grass*.

Two men sit on a blanket and the warm brown eyes and soft beard of the man on the left click into place. The movement in my mind explodes.

"It's you," I whisper. "This is your home."

I turn to find him gone.

SARAH THOMAS

Colony

I tried to prepare them for what it would be like.

I talked to a nudist once
I asked her what the colony was like.
We're not lepers. Nudist Resort.
I apologized.

And I would have apologized for it too
Well, most of it.
Not for the smell of raw sewage at our feet
Or the onslaught of children coming to grab our hands
And take us home.
Not for the missing fingers and feet and noses –
Blue eyes and bandaged nubs.
Not for the rocky path to get there – over the river and outside of
town
Past everything else
Away from it all.

But for the Wal-Mart stickers that the kids fought for
The bright yellow smiley faces plastered on dark feeble ones
For that I am truly sorry.

Polyester Has Made Me Less Spritual

We sang cotton porch songs
 Fluffy tunes with soft melodies
 And simple tones
We sang them back and forth
 And knew each other as we knew
 The notes – beautiful familiar.
I turned my leather days over in my hands
 And watched them wear and change
 Wind that chaps, kisses, burns, blows
I turned them around in my chest
 And found sunsets at my disposal
 And hues of hours that haven't been
 seen since.
I dreamed wool dreams
 And watched the white arouse, not
 Apprehension, but more days
I dreamed them for my children
 Watched the comfortable plays continue
 In my waking and my sleeping.

KATIE TROUT

Caught in the Webb

Foggy morning, dewy grass
as I drive to leave it all behind.
Hate the change – hate the place
that's to be a start over.
“Here’s your key, sign this, and
go to that.”
Voice inside screams run,
let stay.
Wave goodbye and turn to
greet what
they call my future.

Elegy

When my brothers burned the nests
of the tent caterpillars, I didn't watch.
I didn't want to see the bodies dropping
from the trees, twisting, writhing
before lying still, their black ashes dusted
in the wisps of their nests tangled
like burial shrouds in the grass below.
I didn't want to remember those summers
when you showed me the nightcrawlers
that explored the damp world after rain
how to pick them up, how to toss them home
before the sun pushed through the clouds
baking their bodies, curling them black.
I didn't want to remember that only yesterday
a sudden storm and the summer's sullen heat
had littered the front sidewalk with the dead
I forgot I knew how to save.

Why Cornfields Make Good Playgrounds

Because we could play between the rows —
my big sister's green eyeshadow, stolen
and smeared across our cheeks
camouflaging our freckles, shading the pink
of our fading summer sunburns, helping us

hide, jump out, scream, our laughter echoes
of a rated R horror movie we weren't supposed
to have seen. Because the stalks were storytellers
the rustle of wind and silk always reminiscing
of summer weather just right for new toys

at Christmas or pinstriped jeans we
just all *had to have* for the start of school.
Because the ears never listened, but gossiped
about warm springs and rain that soaked
not drowned, the fields, — always better

fortune tellers than the wives of the local firemen
the ones who dressed like gypsies, caressing
foil covered balloons for crystal balls,
and for a quarter, promised us fame and fortune.
Because, before I knew better, I wanted

this world: that dizziness when I strayed
from the paths, lost in the sparks of fireflies
and corn, ripe and heavy, bent towards the ground
almost swallowed by the murmur of twilight
crickets. Even after that one day of hard play

when I rode home with my father, his hand
straightening the baseball cap twisted in my hair
muttering a curse about men and farms and God
his voice low, almost lost, as I watched
your home grow small in the side-view mirror. Because.

Casting Bread[fruit] Upon the Waters

From 1997-2001, my husband and I traveled around the world five times, at three months plus per trip. In the process of recovering after crashing and burning, I was casting my bread in new (writing) waters literally and figuratively. One of the oddest accumulations of connectivity we witnessed centered on French Polynesia.

No matter how often you've seen the beaches of Bora Bora and Tahiti, your next sight still synaesthetizes your dancing senses. You *hear* the colors, *see* the birdsong move among the flowers you can *taste*; your brain *feels*; your mind turns *nose*. For the microsecond, you're in Paradise Regained with Milton (and the fewest others). Even the "black" pearls of the black-lipped oyster special to the South Seas come rainbow-hued: green to gray, lustrous as The First Dawn, with more than glints of gold, pink, blue You understand why Gauguin left Paris, wonder why he returned.

In Tahiti, our guide, staring hard at me as if it were my fault, asserted that Gauguin's natives do not smile. He was not whistling Dixie; though in Eden, the Tahitian subjects of that artist are mostly grim. What thing appalling gave them pall? Is the "*Rue Paul Gauguin*" a punning boulevard? At the time, Parisians thought those frowns demoniac. Where else was one supposed to find the happy savage of report? Gauguin was mad to forego their Paris, but returning to it proved he was insane. Besides, no stream was finer than their Seine! Why not bestow such color on the world that was his own? Why must he so distort Nature and natives? Such human questioning of his masterpieces gave neither natives nor Gauguin surcease. If you are superstitious, you can shrug and say, "Another example of the area's breadfruit exacting a toll."

Given the Paradise re-created in the South Seas, you can also understand why the *Bounty* "miscreants" were reluctant to leave Tahiti for the likes of Bligh and breadfruit. (Harder to understand is why, in defiance of the South Seas' black volcanic beaches, white sand *had to* be imported for the shooting of *Mutiny on the Bounty*.) There truly is a "Myth of the Breadfruit," but I had to shape the backstory and create a derivation for *ululation*.

In far-off days beyond your ken, Tahiti, like a fallen world, suffered

blight and famine. Ulu's son lay dying. Ulu left his home upon his island and went a far journey seeking the Gods. He would learn what to do to save his son. For days and days, Ulu prayed, seeking answers. When the Gods had spoken, Ulu rose and homeward turned.

His instructions to his wife were hard and bitter, like unleavened bread. When Ulu died that night, she must bury his head near their spring; his heart, with his feet, legs, and arms, near the door of their hut, then go to bed and not get up, no matter what she heard. When the hut stirred, rose a foot; when its grasses showered; when the prowling demons howled; when the name of Ulu wailed throughout the island, she kept her promise.

In the morning she thought would never come, Ulu's wife beheld a carpet of vegetation, a garden of shimmering green. Close to where Ulu's heart lay buried, a tall and stately tree with yellow-green round fruit rose into the sky. She picked that fruit to save her dying son and starving neighbors. Always, the tree grew more of this staff of life. They named it the Ulu, the breadfruit tree. Whenever the demons howled, they knew that Ulu was but *ululating*. They did not fear but acknowledged: the breadfruit exacts a rightful toll.

Breadfruit exacted another toll, too. For all his blighting in pseudo-history, Captain Bligh, though single-minded, was not so bad as movies say. He was committed to breadfruit meant to feed slaves cheaply. His major mission in Tahiti was to gather the breadfruit tree seedlings as a future food and money crop for the British West Indies. Captain Bligh was also lucky; though not a Christian man, he lived to tell a Christian story. He returned without the *Bounty* or the booty of the breadfruit. Mr. Christian killed the *Bounty* and could return no more. He lived a life of breadfruit. The breadfruit exacts a toll.

In Tahiti and the French Polynesians, the Breadfruit Tree still grows, but its bounty has been eclipsed. Breadfruit is given raw to us tourists to try dipped in coconut milk, but it's seldom baked into bread. Nor is its heritage recalled. Every hut and house now has a French-bread mail box fronting the road where once was a Ulu Tree. The French bread is baked by a Chinese baker and delivered twice a day. (The mail, but once a week.) How will the breadfruit exact its toll? When will the breadfruit exact its toll?

I like to think of it as "letting cannibals with cannibals come to eat": Captain Bligh in Fiji. Actually, Abel Tasman and Captain Cook were there before him. They are a lucky triumvirate escaping the pot, living to eat again! In the land then known as the Cannibal Isles, the

Fijians, in their *drua*, had chased Bligh and his unmutined few between Viti and Vanna Levu. But Bligh returned on the *Providence* like a plague on both main isles. He came back to chart anew, rechristen their home the Bligh Islands as he'd rechristened Mr. Christian a mutineer

At the time of their encounter with Bligh, Fijians ate sandalwood-seekers, whalers, and missionaries without distinction, speared on their chiefs' great forks and, doubtless, accompanied with breadfruit. Kipling daren't call these Melanesians "fuzzy-wuzzies." (Their hair conveyed rank and tribe.) Fijians fashioned exquisite clubs for bashing their enemies; built their *bures* close to temples; and raised both on vanquished enemies, who also served as rollers for their war canoes. Those of Beqa gained dominance over fire; its young men still fire-walk on red-hot coals, notably for tourists.

The Great Chief Thakombau converted himself and the Fijians to Christianity. Now their *mangili* package Other-Meat in banana leaves to bake in a *lovo*, earth oven. Now their staple is *lolo*—coconut milk; their ceremonies run to *kava*; they slurp succulent sea-slugs; chew *walu*, the sea bass; take their catch in village-wide fish drives; and live in *mataqali*, extended families.

Fijians wove walls of pandanus leaves, made cordage from copra, tapa cloth from bark; summoned with *lali* and *davui*—drum and conch shell; worked the coral reefs in *takia*—outrigger canoes; strolled among hibiscus, plumbago, canna, and the rare tagimaucia; found art in triggerfish, *humu-humu*, now known as "Picasso." They overcame the measles emigrating on an Australian naval vessel and took up the cotton trade disrupted by the War Between the States. Always knowing the value of land, they leased it but would never sell. But the breadfruit was lurking. The Indians the Fijians brought in to work the sugar cane took over the businesses if not the land. *Now*, who cannibalizes whom?

On 7 February 2001, we anchored off that same Pitcairn Island that was chosen for its remoteness by Mr. Christian and the *Bounty* mutineers. (Pitcairn is still the most remote of Britain's shores.) Pitcairn's pea size prevented our landing. We circumnavigated two times. Map-in-hand, I picked out "Where Dan Fall," "Timiti's Crack," "John Catch A Cow," "Stone People Fight For." Here was History singing in the naming. Here was History *live*.

Pitcairn's forty-nine inhabitants came over in their longboat, boarding the *Rotterdam* with their crafts, stamps, and such products as

honey. They spread their wares on tables around the Lido pool. The shoppers and the simply curious among us came and came.

The Pitcairners spelled one another at their task and joined the lunch line in the Lido. They clustered to choose desserts while I dined on polyglot "Pitcairn" (though English is their official language), e.g., "You tallin' toly!" ("You lie!"), Pitcairn, in this instance, for "You've got to be kidding!"

The *Rotterdam's* High Chef (with every Sous) would have savored the flavor of their response. A young girl reached out in awe to touch the elaborate fruit carvings decorating the various buffets. The one holding her interest longest was a Polynesian face carved in a watermelon half. Did it remind her of her neighbors and herself, a line of intermingled Tahitians and Europeans extraordinarily bonded? Here was History singing in the blood.

To escape the hard life on Pitcairn, the islanders at one point petitioned the British Government for relocation. They were given Norfolk Island, the once notorious penal colony between Australia and New Zealand. But Pitcairn rioted in their racial memory; many returned. They could be bounded in a nutshell to count themselves kings and queens of infinite space, for they had good dreams.

Colleen McCullough was on board to read and lecture to us but there primarily, it turned out, because the *Rotterdam* was to visit Pitcairn Island, ancestral home of her husband Rick. She met him when she moved to Norfolk Island to avoid the perils of *Thorn Birds* fame. He is descended from Fletcher Christian (whose family in turn was related to that of William Wordsworth). Though Rick had never been to Pitcairn, like all Pitcairn-descended, he was pulled by Pitcairn. That day, he saw his people's island and some of his people for the very first time. "Mine eyes dazzled" (not to mention Rick's and all the forty-nine's): history as destiny singing, singing *live* . . . breadfruit tolling.

Oh, but recently the news of taint has taken Pitcairn. Rape . . . abuse . . . the label "half-caste" The lineage of breadfruit has exacted—its *worst*—toll. Still, there is that rhythm as old as Scripture, older than Scripture, of humans falling away but returning to their humanity, their God/gods; of loss and recovery; of humans casting their bread and breadfruit upon the waters. I speak from experience—of breadfruit and otherwise.

CHERISH WILSON

Word Problem

Two trains approach from their opposite ideological directions
Traveling with unnatural speed toward a poet tied to the track.
If English is coming from the east,
And Science is rushing from the west,
How long before the wreckage cools
And the disciplines become a newly-welded form of art?
When the poet can emerge from the metal, into a world
In which, carbons and permutations can hold a magic
Just as mystical as any poetry or prose.
Algebraic sonnets.
Romantic quadrilaterals.

Metaphor

*for the owner of the cross-trainers
that I trip over in the morning*

Early on in June, when we met for drinks,
You imparted to me some secret to life.
Drunk, you were offering instruction
Clumsily tripping over it, using jargon,
As if boating were a metaphor for life.
Ideas about even keels and moral anchors
Trade winds, seaworthy Jimmy Buffett platitudes.

“It was meant to be,” you whispered and blushed
In the driveway, bathed in yellow petals of porch light.
And we spent the rest of the night dodging clichés
As they fell from the sky, mimicking meteors.
As if burning bright was a metaphor for life.
You called me a Shiva “but freckled, still fierce
Less arms, same attitude,” and laughed.

My fierceness, like my freckles, fades away.
It’d be foolish to fight a comfort like this
When it leaves me as worn down at the edges
As those muddied old Nike cross-trainers.
As if running were a metaphor for life.
To find my blushing lover and at a wolfish pace
Love him loudly, without any startled kisses.

Why I Don't Like Tomatoes

Tomatoes are American. No questions. What do you eat on fries? Ketchup. Burgers? Ketchup *and* tomatoes. Spaghetti? Stewed tomatoes. Tacos? Vinegared tomatoes. There are way over a thousand varieties of tomatoes and even more recipes that feature them, but I don't like tomatoes. Very un-American, I know. Let me show you what I'm talking about.

For years, there's been a debate over whether tomatoes are fruits or vegetables. Due to their seed content, they are scientifically classified as fruit, but have you ever seen tomatoes in a fruit salad? Or sprinkled liberally over someone's cereal? In my twenty-one years of experience, tomatoes only come with vegetables. If it can't decide which food group to join, can you understand my hesitation to eat it?

I don't know about you, but my palate is partial to textures: I don't like food that feels pre-chewed. Crunchy is good; chewy, great! But a tomato, all the way from skin to pith, is smooshy. Sure they look appealing: smooth, firm, shiny. But have you ever tried to slice one? The second you break the surface of that thin, tenuous skin, your knife can't hold a straight line. So you tighten your holding hand in order to give the knife more substance to cut through and you end up squashing the insides all over the cutting board.

Then there are the grape and cherry tomatoes (vegetables named for fruits? or redundant fruit namings?) that restaurant salad bars are so fond of. *If* you manage to get one to your mouth (forks don't stab tight, round objects; no one eats salad with a spoon; fingers aren't used in a restaurant; and slicing tiny balls without launching one into orbit is a feat still unmastered) then you have a dilemma: based on past experience, every time you eat a whole grape or cherry tomato, they do one of two things. 1) The item will explode so forcefully in your mouth that you end up spewing tiny seeds and bits of tomato guts from between clenched lips. 2) If you try biting it in half, the same vegetable fireworks occur, only there's no barrier of lips to protect those sitting on either side of you. *If* you should manage to perform either of the above without the outward shrapnel, the obvious event follows: you bite into the little tomato and it squirts down your throat, seeds, citric acid, slimy coating, peel, and all. I don't have the stomach

to describe the results of *that* one.

While we're on it, I have serious concerns about eating any quantity of flat, poop-colored seeds. What do they do inside of you? You know they don't get digested. They don't seem to make a reappearance either (just trust me on this one). So they must be inside you still. And what do seeds do in warm, moist environments such as the one found in your small intestine? They sprout.

Even the process of getting to the seeds is gross. The skin of a tomato is about equivalent to those pool floats we used to have as kids. It doesn't matter how much you stab and maul them, they're virtually indestructible. Which doesn't bode well for your insides. Again, texture comes into play. Just under the skin is a layer of grainy stuff that loses its form the instant it comes in contact with human tissues. Then you've got pithy mush swirling between your teeth. Yum!

The most repulsive thing about tomatoes, though, is the way other people eat them. First, you've got the 'applers' – grab a tomato and bite right in, seeds and pulp dripping down your chin – mm, mm, good. Then there are the old folks: "I like mah 'maters with salt. Cut 'em right in half an' coat 'em real good with salt. Boy-o!" The third group act like grape and cherry tomatoes are toys or candy, popping them whole, one after the other, appearing to enjoy the burst of slime in their mouths. Some people eat their tomatoes with mayonnaise. As soon as the mayonnaise comes out of the fridge, though, I'm gone – but that's another subject entirely. Campbell's has monopolized on the fourth group's favorite tomato-eating idea: soup. Mulled wine looks just the same when you spoon it from a bowl and tastes a hundred times better. But my favorite, the hands-down winners, are the Brits. Whose idea was it to broil a tomato? Best of all, who thought to serve this warm, oozy veggie delight with its blackened, crispy skin at *breakfast*, of all meals?

Tomatoes hold an important place in the American food chain. Could you imagine broccoli ketchup? Or cucumber salsa? Definitely not. And when it comes to eating tomatoes, I'm not opposed to the practice; I just prefer them with something that will completely overpower them.

Serenade

I attempt to formulate and codify
by converting your essence into pictures,
carving your image into my dusty wall
like some ancient language
etched inside a cave

but you are a jazz melody

bounce and dip of ivory and black
steadfast singing of horns
saxophonic alacrity
unresolved silence
longing love promise in the dark.

word-pictures, if I could carve
you into my dust,
would pacify the strictness
near my breasts
even in your harmony

but words cloud warm midnight
in ours souls
and still the voice of song.

I cannot say words are enough
and I cannot hammer you into whisper.

Humility

House dark, we postponed
our outbuilding search
for your first horn.

You kissed me in the kitchen,
paced back and forth a few minutes,
then settled on the couch to wait.

Before Grandmother and Pop got home,
we watched the muted
colors of one your
performances from a homemade DVD.

On it, you played with the church band
a song about Heaven and going there,
making your horn sing above tambourines,
plunky rhythm of bass guitar, dance of drums,
piano keys, and off-key voices.

None of us who watched
you will ever be able to settle for less,

but you said that's really all a church
band should sound like
and the top and bottom of the small
TV screen collapsed into blackness
up and down
on top of each other as you
flipped a switch.

As we rambled through the ice box,
looking for something sweet and cold,
you sang fast and brilliant words,
a song about Heaven and going there,

and your song flowed,
not like an un-dammed river,
not like a mighty river,
like a clear mountain stream
complete with harmony of gurgle and rush,
sparkling sun-diamonds on its surface
until Grandmother and Pop arrived.

After that we conducted our memory
hunt through their storage buildings,
dusty, dim, but organized and cared for
with plastic coverings,

and somehow in the interval
between house and outbuildings,
somehow as we rambled in the kitchen
before our search for your clarinet

you gave Grandmother your song

for her voice joined yours as we
uncovered a faded black instrument case,
and I watched her brown eyes shine in the sunlight.

None of us will ever be the same.

MEGAN L. WORRELL

Lattimore/Nashville Rails

You're staring a journey down these tracks and lay down all that
you own.

Laying down your heart on the rails doesn't mean you don't do it
without hesitance
Or second guesses,
Or thoughts of the past,
What might not be and maybe worse yet, what might be forming
this moment out of
Your reach.

We watch and wait and hear that train roaring down its
rollercoaster track,

I have to cover my ears to bear its sting,
But when this loving hand has passed its way through,
The pieces of your heart are still true,

In a different form of course, not the natural way as we see it, but
maybe it is something
Too beautiful to see.

The coins and treasures that you are laying down are caught by a
great net,

One that shows them the true way to go.

Keep on walking down those tracks no matter the deafening sound,
Because somewhere beyond them I know,
You know.

2:48 AM

I slept in my clothes last night,
trying to unwind.
I slept in my clothes last night,
hoping to evade this power inside my mind
that keeps me awake,
and alive and dead in mire.
Crazy complications in the room next door,
trying to un-find the face that I explored it much
too late. I hope I didn't lose to fate.
And I'm trying to unwind.

CONTRIBUTORS

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